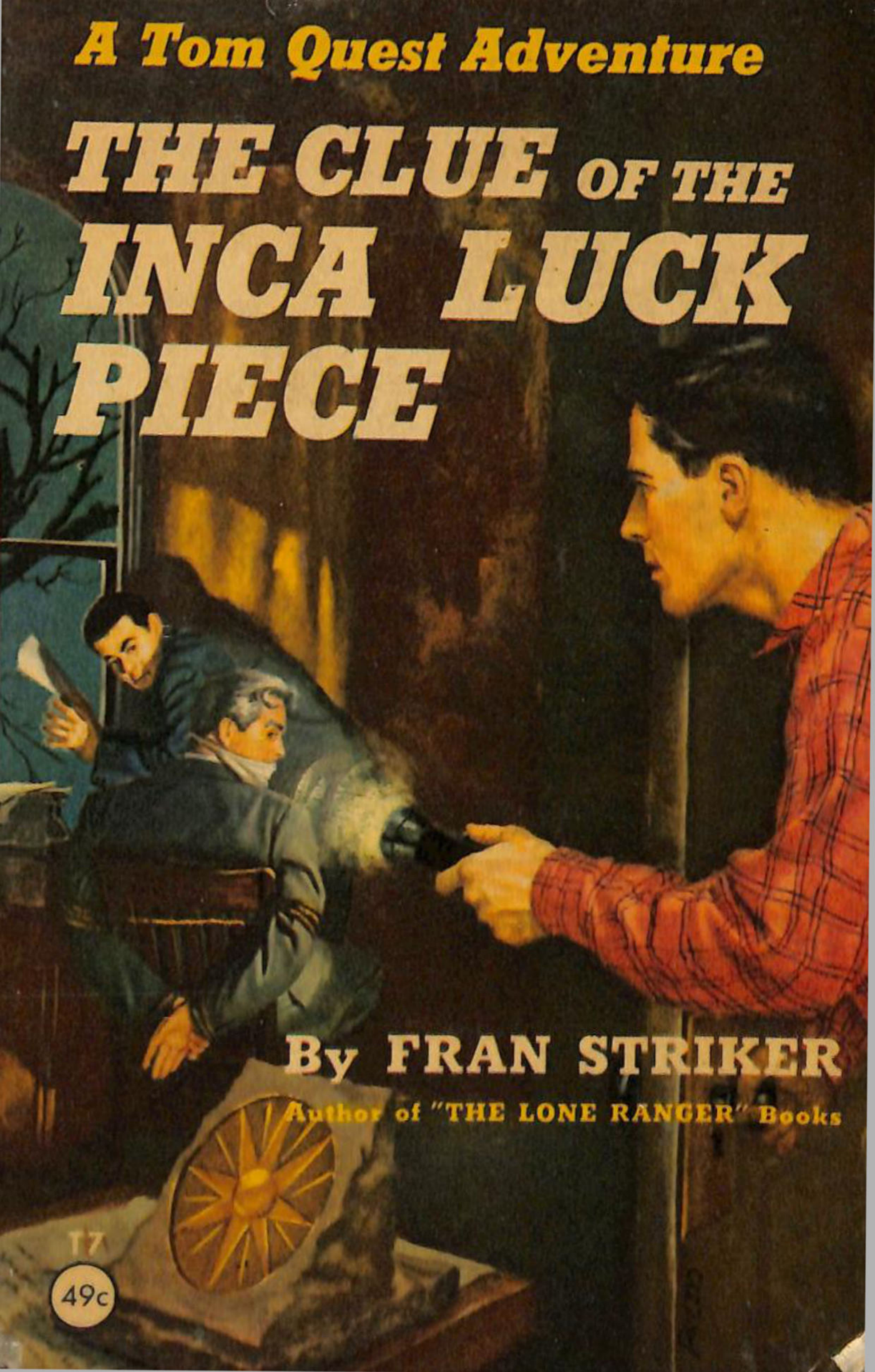
A Tom Quest Adventure

THE CLUE OF THE INCA LUCK PIECE



By FRAN STRIKER

Author of "THE LONE RANGER" Books

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THE INCA LUCK PIECE

On the thick carpeting a silent figure approached Tom's back

A Tom Quest Adventure

THE INCA LUCK PIECE

By

FRAN STRIKER

McLoughlin Bros.

NEW YORK

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The Inca Luck Piece

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THE
INCA
LUCK PIECE

CHAPTER 1

A Case of Dynamite

SINCE becoming a feature writer whose work was syndicated to over a hundred newspapers, "Whiz" Walton enjoyed the distinction of occupying an office of his own in the *Metropolitan Journal* Building. It was a small office, barely large enough to hold a desk, chair,

and typewriter stand. But a private office, with his name on the frosted glass door, meant that the tall, thin man belonged to the small group of journalists who could choose their assignments and set their own working hours.

Whiz stood at the window, looking down at the typical noonday jam on New York's Forty-fifth Street, when his telephone rang. He sat down at his desk and picked up the phone.

"Walton speaking," he said.

"Yo', Whiz." The familiar voice had a rasping quality that rattled the receiver.

"Gulliver!" exclaimed the columnist delightedly. "I'm glad to hear from you!" He glanced at an enlarged snapshot of his friend on the wall above his desk. It showed Gulliver standing in front of his ranch house in Texas. "Are you calling from Texas?"

"No. If I was in Texas, I wouldn't have no need to call yo' or anyone else. I'd be able to buy dynamite at the handiest store. But here in New York—"

"You're in New York?" cut in Whiz Walton.

"Yep. I—"

"Holy mackerel! Why didn't you let me know you were here?"

"I did let yo' know! I just told yo'."

"When did you arrive?"

"Five o'clock this mornin'. I drove here in my jeep."

"Where are you staying?"

"I'm at Quest's apartment."

"What were you saying about dynamite?"

There was a pause at the other end of the line. Then Gulliver said, "Whiz, if yo'd just shut up for a couple o' seconds, I'd like to ask a question. Where in this city can I buy a case o' dynamite?"

"What in blazes do you want of dynamite?"

"It'll maybe come in handy if I got to break up some rock. I've been goin' through the telephone directory, callin' hardware stores, but none o' them seem to handle the stuff."

"Gulliver, I know there's a lot of rock in New York, but it's against the law to break it up. The police are narrow-minded about—"

Gulliver cut in. "I'm talkin' about uranium rock."

"Where?"

"Some place called Alexandria. Tom Quest an' his father are leavin' for there tomorrow mornin'. Yo' an' me are goin' with 'em."

"This is the first I heard of it!"

"Tom meant to call yo', but early this mornin', his father had a phone call, tellin' him to take the first plane to Washin'ton, an' Tom went with him. He asked me to phone yo'."

"Who called Hamilton Quest?"

"I don't know, Whiz. It was some gent in that Atomic Energy Commission." Gulliver made the announcement in the same casual manner he might have used in commenting on the weather.

"The Atomic Energy Commission!" exclaimed Whiz

Walton. "Something big must be popping. You say they left for Washington this morning?"

"Yep. Soon after I got here. That's why I didn't have the chance to git much in the way o' information."

The columnist flipped open an atlas to the list of cities as Gulliver continued.

"They figure on gittin' back late this afternoon, an' they'll be here in the apartment this evenin', so if yo' want to ask any more questions, yo' come over an' talk to Quest an' Tom. Now about that dynamite—"

"If you need dynamite I'll find it for you," said Whiz excitedly. "Did you say they're leaving for Alexandria tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow mornin'."

"There are over a dozen places called Alexandria, but the most important one is in Egypt. Is that where they're going?"

"I don't know. They didn't mention the last name."

"The last name?"

"They didn't say whether it was Alexandria, Egypt; Alexandria, Virginia, or one o' the others."

"And they're going to look for uranium?"

"That's what it sounded like. Yo' goin' with us?"

"Well," began the columnist, "I don't know. It's mighty short notice. I'll have to think it over."

"I'll hold the phone while yo' think it over. I got to know if yo're goin'. Now don't do a lot o' shilly-shallyin'. Make up yo' mind."

Whiz felt as though the machinery of his brain were

racing in high gear. In the immediate future he had no plans that could not be cancelled. "Count me in," he said. "I'll see you at Quest's apartment tonight."

"Try to bring that case o' dynamite along."

Whiz hung up the phone without making any promises regarding dynamite, then leaned back in his swivel chair and stretched out his long legs.

It was nothing new to be invited on short notice by Tom Quest or Gulliver to travel on strange expeditions to far places. It was a matter of record that the columnist's reputation stemmed from his accounts of these expeditions.

As he thought about the past adventures, his index finger idly traced a spiral figure on the arm of his chair. This geometric form had a strange significance that will be recalled by readers of *Sign of the Spiral.* This is the story that tells of the beginning of Whiz Walton's association with Tom Quest and Gulliver, and how the trio solved the mystery of a secret tunnel.

Though only seventeen, Tom had the mental development of an adult, which, combined with youthful enthusiasm and a deeply rooted interest in the world and its inhabitants, made him an interesting companion. And he was a true-blue friend. Gulliver was old enough to be Tom's father. He had, in fact, served as the boy's guardian during a ten-year period when Hamilton Quest had been a captive of savages in the jungles of Ecuador.

The trip to Ecuador and the rescue of Tom's father

from the Jivaro headhunters is fully recounted under the title, *The Telltale Scar.*

Back in the States, Hamilton Quest took up his work as a brilliant scientist and added to his achievements by writing a number of books and articles on archeology, geology, and the higher branches of mathematics.

Whiz Walton recalled a thrilling manhunt with Tom and Gulliver in the cypress swamps of Florida; the finding of a lost Aztec civilization in an ancient city in Mexico; a hair-raising trip to the upper portions of the United States in search of a strange rock of tremendous significance; and the solving of a curious mystery in the eerie interior of a Texas mountain.

Now, Whiz wondered if he stood on the threshold of an adventure that could come even close to matching those of the past for excitement.

"Uranium," he murmured. "The Atomic Energy Commission sending for Quest. Yes, something big must be popping."

His musing was interrupted by a sharp rap on the door.

CHAPTER 2

Underground Intrigue

"Come in," called Whiz.

It was J. V. Langdon, managing editor of the *Metropolitan Journal*, who entered the columnist's office and closed the door.

"Hi, Boss," grinned Whiz. "Want to sit on the edge of the desk, sit in my chair, or stand up?"

"Stand," replied the gray-haired editor. "You know Hamilton Quest, don't you?"

"You know I do."

"What's he doing?"

"The last time I saw him was about two weeks ago. At that time he was putting the finishing touches to a magazine article about the ruins of the Inca civilization in Peru. And he was sorting out a lot of photographs he'd made of the Inca ruins around Peru in the area of Cuzco and Manchu Piccu. Also, he was—"

"Cut!" interrupted the editor. "I'm not interested in what he was doing two weeks ago. I didn't say what *was* he doing. I said what *is* he doing!"

"At this moment," Whiz grinned and glanced at his watch, "I'd have to be a mind-reader to know."

"Confound you, Walton, stop evading! You know what I mean. What's Quest's current interest?"

"Any particular reason for asking?"

"Yes. I just had a phone call from our Washington correspondent. He said he saw Hamilton Quest and his son Tom entering the office of one of the top brass in the Atomic Energy Commission."

"That's interesting," observed the columnist, "but not surprising. Hamilton Quest is an authority on minerals and rocks which makes him an authority on uranium ore. Inasmuch as uranium is vitally important in making atomic bombs and peacetime equipment, it follows that Quest would have something in common with the commission."

"Walton," snapped Langdon, "I knew you when you were a cub reporter. I knew you when you had just one pair of pants and had to hide behind a curtain in the tailor shop when they were being pressed!"

"Those were the days," grinned Whiz.

"I know you like I know the palm of my hand. I can read you like I can read an eight-column banner. I know when you're leveling with me and when you're talking fast to evade a straight answer to a simple question. Right now you're holding out on me. Why is Quest in Washington?"

Whiz became sober. "I admit I was kidding a bit, Boss. Now I'll level with you."

"Thanks!" the editor said dryly.

"I'll tell you all I know, which isn't much. Gulliver's in town. Remember him?"

"Like I remember the attack on Pearl Harbor!"

"He phoned from Quest's apartment just a few minutes ago. He thinks Quest is leaving tomorrow morning to search for uranium."

"Where?"

"Alexandria."

"Egypt?"

"Gulliver didn't know."

"Certainly not Alexandria, Virginia."

"Probably not. But there are ten or eleven other towns in this country with the same name. It could be any one of them.

"A few minutes after Gulliver reached Quest's apart-

ment, there was a call from the AEC in Washington. Tom and his father left for Washington immediately, so Gulliver didn't have a chance to learn any more about their plans. However, he said he was going with them to Alexandria, and he told me they'd be glad to have me go along."

"You going?"

Though Whiz Walton had already decided to go, his face took on a dubious expression. "I don't know," he said. "I've always had a bang-up story when I went anywhere with Tom Quest and Gulliver, and this looks like it might be bigger than anything that's gone before. Probably I should go, for the sake of the newspaper, but—"

"That'll do, Whiz. You've made up your mind to go, but you don't want to say so. You'd rather I'd ask you to go, in which case you'll travel on an expense account."

"Aw, what's the use?" grinned the columnist. "I can't put anything over on you."

"Glad you finally realize it."

"How about a cash advance to cover expenses?"

"All right. Come to my office and I'll sign a voucher for you."

Langdon opened the door quickly and nearly bumped into a slender man with tousled black hair and thick-lensed glasses who stood in the corridor.

"Oh, it's you, Newman," the editor said.

"Yes, Mr. Langdon. I was waiting for you to come out so I could speak to Mr. Walton."

"Who are you?" asked Whiz. "Do you work here?"

"Yes, Mr. Walton."

"He's new," said Langdon. "Hired last week. His name is Newman. Newman, this is Whiz Walton," the editor completed the introduction.

"Welcome to the *Journal*," said Whiz. He found Newman's handshake limp and moist. "Did you want to speak to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Walton. I—I've heard a lot about you. I've read practically everything you've written, and I've been very anxious to meet you. I—I—uh—" Newman smiled, then continued in his fawning manner, "I finally decided to walk in and introduce myself."

"Right now," said Whiz, "I'm working against time. I'll be gone for a while. When I get back, drop in."

"Oh, thank you," replied Newman. "I shall do so."

Whiz watched the new employee walk down to the end of the corridor and go through the door to the city room. "A character," he said to Langdon.

"But a brilliant one."

"He looks like a dope."

"He's traveled all over the world and studied in two or three foreign countries. He speaks about nine different languages."

"What's his special line?"

"World affairs."

"I don't like his type," said Whiz, "but I suppose he's harmless."

The columnist would have revised his opinion if he

had been able to follow Newman's activities for the next quarter hour.

Newman entered the city room and kept going past the long line of desks to the door. He walked down two flights of stairs to the street floor where there was a telephone booth in the lobby of the building. Entering the booth, he dropped a dime into the slot and dialed for the long-distance operator.

"I want to place a station-to-station call to Washington." He gave the operator a number, and while waiting for the connection to be completed, took a handful of coins from his pocket and placed them on the little ledge beneath the phone. When told to do so, he dropped the proper coins into the slots.

"Go ahead," said the operator.

"Hello?"

"Who speaks?" said a guttural voice from Washington.

"Newman. Is this Comrade Malin?"

"I've told you not to use my name," said Malin, with a distinctly foreign accent. "We never know when the wires are tapped."

"I have information."

"Urgent?"

"Yes. Time is of the essence."

"In that case, tell me and we shall hope no one is listening. First tell me how you came by the information."

"I was in the corridor outside an office door and heard Walton talking to Langdon."

"What did you hear?"

"Hamilton Quest is in Washington to confer with someone in the Atomic Energy Commission."

"Um," murmured Malin. "Quest is one of the important scientists."

"That is why I thought you'd be interested in this conference."

"Do you know any more?"

"Only that he plans to go somewhere to look for uranium."

"When?"

"He leaves New York tomorrow morning."

"You say he is now in Washington?"

"I think so."

"Have you anything further to report?"

"No."

"Let me know when you have."

"I'll be in touch with you."

Newman hung up the phone and returned to his desk, while in Washington, D. C., the man named Malin started the operation of a smoothly functioning unit of Communist spies.

CHAPTER 3

The Inca Relic

When not at school, Tom Quest lived with his father in an apartment near Central Park. It was an old-fashioned apartment with high ceilings and large rooms to hold Hamilton Quest's extensive library and the rocks and relics he had accumulated from all parts of the world.

Tom and his father took turns doing the cooking and tried to outdo each other in the preparation of food. A cleaning woman came each morning and did her best to keep the rooms in order without disturbing any of the books or papers on the scientist's desk, the rock samples that littered a table on which a microscope stood, or the assortment of curiosa on shelves.

When Whiz Walton arrived, he found a slide projector set up at one end of the long living room and a screen hung from hooks at the opposite end. He was warmly welcomed by his friends.

Tom and his father shook hands with Whiz. Gulliver slapped him on the back, and received in return a friendly jab in the stomach.

"Did yo' bring the dynamite?" the big man asked.

"No, but I can get it if it's needed."

"Dynamite for what?" asked Tom.

"Rock blastin'. When I told Whiz we were takin' off in the mornin', I told him he'd better line up some dynamite, because I didn't know where we could buy it in New York."

Quest smiled. "We'll not need dynamite."

"Gulliver called me at the office and said you were leaving for Alexandria in the morning."

"That's right."

"He said it had to do with uranium."

"In a way."

"I thought we were goin' prospectin'," put in Gulliver.

"No, Gulliver." To the columnist, Hamilton Quest

said, "We were summoned to Washington before we could tell Gulliver the nature of this trip. We returned only a short time ago, so he is still in the dark. To save repeating the explanation, I thought it better to wait until you arrived."

"Now that Whiz is here," said Gulliver, "how's about givin' us the true facts?"

"Tom, will you get the slides ready and the projector plugged in?"

"Sure thing, Dad." Tom moved to the stand on which the projector stood.

"Gulliver says you're going with us, Whiz."

"I'd like to, Mr. Quest. If you're sure you want me to—"

"I am sure. As a matter of fact, we may need you to handle press relations."

"That's my line," replied Whiz enthusiastically. "I'll be your press agent."

"*Sup*-press agent. I think that more accurately defines the nature of your work."

"You mean you want to keep things *out* of the papers?"

"Yes. At the request of the Atomic Energy Commission and the State Department."

"What's the State Department got to do with it? Are international relations likely to be involved?"

"Yes indeed!" said Quest emphatically. "If any newspapermen hear of our work, you'll have to send them

off on a wild-goose chase. Draw red herrings across the trail."

The columnist chuckled. "My boss is going to flip when he hears he's put me on an expense account to help you keep news *out* of the paper!"

"He will be mollified when you are able to give him an exclusive story—after our work is finished."

"How are we going to travel?" asked Whiz.

"I've chartered a small plane."

"I wanted to take my jeep," said Gulliver, "but Quest turned thumbs down."

"Take your jeep! To Egypt?"

Tom called from the other end of the room. "What's that about Egypt?"

"Isn't that where we're going?"

Tom laughed. "Gosh, no!"

Whiz said, "Gulliver told me we were going to Alexandria."

"Alexandria *Bay!*" laughed Quest. "That's a small town on the St. Lawrence River. It's right here in New York State."

"That's near the Thousand Islands!"

"That's right."

Gulliver looked down at the floor and mumbled, "Doggone! I didn't hear yo' mention any bay."

"We'll take a plane to the airport, then go by boat to an island several miles upstream. It is a six-acre island owned by a friend of mine named Bosworth."

"John Bosworth?" asked Whiz. "John Harvey Bosworth, the railroad magnate?"

"Yes," replied Quest. "Do you know him?"

"I've never met him, but I've heard a lot about him. I remember his name as far back as twenty years ago! When I was a kid he was a big wheel on the Harvard football team. Made All-American three years in a row."

"Yes. He used to be a fine athlete."

Whiz chuckled. "He'll appreciate you, Gulliver."

Quest said, "Whiz, have you had dinner?"

"Yes, thanks," the columnist replied. "What about you and Tom?"

"We had dinner on the plane." Quest turned to Tom. "Is the projector ready, son?"

"All set, Dad."

"Then I might as well begin the explanation," said Quest. "I'll handle the projector, Tom. You sit down with Whiz and Gulliver."

Tom switched off all but one lamp in the room while Hamilton Quest took his place behind the projector. "The first slide," he said, "is a color picture of the Inca luck piece or charm."

A golden sunburst appeared on the white screen. It was a round medallion set in the slanting face of a triangular chunk of rock.

"That is, of course, very much enlarged," said Hamilton Quest. "That rock is roughly a right triangle with each of the two legs about eight inches in length. The hypotenuse face, on which the Inca good-luck charm

is mounted, is proportionate in length and about six inches wide. The medallion is about five inches in diameter and it is made of solid gold. You'll notice that the Inca conception of the sun has been carved on the gold."

"Is that a relic of the ancient Inca civilization in Peru?" asked Whiz Walton.

"Yes. It came from somewhere east of the Andes Mountains. Please keep that in mind. We'll return to it later."

The next slide showed a huge stone house surrounded by lawns and gardens. "This," said Quest, "is the summer home of John Bosworth. As I told you, it is on a six-acre island, one of the Thousand Island group. Bosworth owns the entire island."

Whiz uttered a low, exclamatory whistle. "What a place!" he murmured.

"I made that photograph when I visited Bosworth a few weeks ago. Also this next one."

"That's Bosworth," said the columnist. "He hasn't changed much since his college days."

The multimillionaire was a solidly built man whose crisp black hair was slightly streaked with gray. His eyes were level and his jaw firm.

"What's that in his hand?"

"A Geiger counter," replied Quest. "Used to detect radioactivity."

"I know a lot of men who've bought them," said Whiz.

"Yes," agreed the scientist. "The uranium bug has a bite like that of the gold bug. People today are looking everywhere for uranium. Many people who own rocky land have either bought or rented a Geiger counter on the off-chance that there might be valuable ore on their property. Bosworth went over his land, but found nothing until he came into his library."

"His library?"

"Yes. He happened to carry the instrument into his library, and there it began to click. He finally learned that the radioactivity came from the Inca relic that he bought many years ago while on a trip to Peru. He found it in a shop in Lima. As you may have guessed, it is the gold medallion I showed you a moment ago."

Quest changed the slide. The picture showed Bosworth again. This time he was standing in his luxurious library beside a pedestal on which rested the heavy rock surmounted with the gold medallion. Bosworth was holding the Geiger counter close to the rock and grinning.

"The next slide," said Quest, "shows a close-up of the Geiger counter."

The picture showed the needle of the Geiger counter registering high on the scale.

"After Bosworth learned that the Inca stone was radioactive, he telephoned me. I explained that radioactivity did not necessarily mean that the rock held uranium. There are many other things that register as radioactive.

"I went to Bosworth's home on the island, taking with me the necessary equipment and chemicals, to test that stone."

"What did you find?" asked Whiz Walton.

"It is extremely rich in uranium!"

"Holy mackerel!"

Quest turned off the projector. "No use wasting the bulb," he said. "I have one more picture to show you, but first I have quite a bit to say. I want to explain why we are going to Bosworth Island, and why the Government is extremely interested in the developments of the next few days. Also, why secrecy is of the greatest importance."

Whiz Walton felt a tingling sensation in his spine. "What's the last picture?" he asked. "Can't you show it to us now?"

"No," replied Quest. "Not until I've prepared you for it."

"Just wait," said Tom. "You're in for a surprise!"

CHAPTER 4

The Last Slide

"Doggone," grumbled Gulliver. "It seems to me there's an awful lot o' whoop-de-do over a hunk o' rock that I could lift with one hand."

"The point is," said Hamilton Quest, "that piece of rock came from Peru."

"We got better rocks in Texas. We got 'em hard an' soft, big an' small, an' in a dozen different colors. We got gold-bearin' rock an' silver-bearin' rock. An' I bet if I was to spend enough time I could find that there uranium stuff, too. There's nothin' in Peru or anywhere else that shades what we got in Texas."

In the dim light Hamilton Quest smiled at the big man's loyalty. "Have you ever found big, perfect diamonds in Texas?" he asked.

"Yo' know blame well I haven't," said Gulliver. "Diamonds don't grow in Texas."

"How do you know?"

"Well, no one's ever found any."

"So it is generally assumed that there are none to be found." The scientist moved to a shelf and selected a rock about the size of his fist. "Here," he said, "Is a rock specimen that came from Texas. Let us suppose that in examining it, I find half a dozen diamonds, each one large enough to be used for jewelry. What would you do?"

"Me, I'd hightail back to Texas an' start lookin' for more o' that same kind o' rock."

"But Texas is a large state. Where would you begin your search?"

"Wherever that hunk o' rock came from," replied Gulliver.

"Suppose none of us knew where the rock came from?"

Gulliver frowned. He pondered for a moment, then said, "I reckon we'd have to dig up the whole state."

"And get shot," chuckled Whiz Walton, "as soon as you stepped on someone's private property."

"Let me make a further supposition, Gulliver. Suppose we published the news. Suppose the newspapers came out with big headlines announcing that diamonds had been found in rock that came from Texas. What would happen?"

"There'd be a rush that'd make the biggest gold stampede look pulin' by comparison! Fly-by-nights from all over the world would rush to Texas an' start diggin'! A lot o' them would git shot for diggin' private property. The rangeland would be torn up, an' cattle shot for gittin' into the way o' the prospectors. All in all, there'd be a mess o' trouble!"

"A mess o' trouble," repeated Hamilton Quest. "I think that describes the situation. Now, if instead of publishing the news, we kept it secret until we learned exactly where the rock came from, then went to the authorities in Texas and the owner of that particular property, we would avoid a lot of trouble. Isn't that true?"

"I reckon so. But what in tarnation have diamonds in Texas got to do with uranium in Peru?"

"I used diamonds in Texas to illustrate the situation. To date, there have been no important discoveries of uranium in Peru. But in Bosworth's library, there is a

sample of rock, known to have come from Peru, and known to be rich in uranium. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that a rich deposit lies in the place from which that rock was taken."

"And we're the only ones who know about it!" exclaimed Whiz Walton.

"We are among the few who know about it," corrected Tom's father. "Bosworth knows about it, also his attorney, who was visiting the island when I was there a few weeks ago. And there are a few men in Washington who know of the discovery."

"If the news is made public," said Whiz, "there'll be a rush of prospectors to Peru."

"Right," agreed Quest. "People from all over the world would flock there. They would invade private property and disrupt the country. Moreover, the sudden rush of people with money to spend would cause an economic upheaval, and Peruvian laborers would leave their jobs in the cities and on farms to join the search for uranium. On top of all this, there would surely be bloodshed and fighting between the newcomers and the natives. To quote Gulliver, there would be a 'mess o' trouble.' "

"You can say that again," said Whiz Walton.

"The Peruvian authorities would be angry, and the Communists would add fuel to the fires of their anger."

"How could the Reds do anything?"

"By claiming the United States had perpetrated a

trick in announcing that uranium was to be found. The Communists would step in with trumped-up proof that we did it to stir up internal disorder in Peru. What's more, if no one found uranium, it might appear to the Peruvians that the Communists were right.

"Bosworth, his attorney, and I discussed these possibilities. Then I wrote to a friend who has a high position in the State Department, told him what we had learned, and asked for his advice. I told him that Bosworth would, if so instructed, send the radioactive rock to Washington for further study."

"What did your friend suggest?"

"He wrote saying that he had conferred with other officials. He said that, above all, the discovery must be kept secret. He suggested that the rock be kept in Bosworth's home and that I study it there in an effort to learn specifically what part of Peru it came from."

"Can you determine that?"

"I think I can."

"Then what?"

"Then the State Department will convey the information secretly to the Peruvian Government. The government will be able to make its own investigation, and if uranium is found, negotiate to sell it to this country."

"That makes sense," observed Whiz. "That lays the problem in the lap of Peru. If they choose to make the news public, no one can accuse the United States of a plot to stir up trouble."

"The State Department," said Quest, "gave a top-secret report to the Atomic Energy Commission."

"That's where you went today, isn't it?" asked Whiz.

"Yes. I was notified that a representative of the Commission will join us at Bosworth's home. He will be there simply as an observer while I study the rock and the gold medallion."

"It seems to me," said the columnist, "that it'll be a mighty tough job to trace that rock to a specific location. Finding a needle in a haystack would be a cinch by comparison."

"You are mistaken, Whiz. In searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack, we would be hampered by lack of clues. In tracing the rock to its place of origin, we have a lot of clues."

Tom, who had taken no part in the conversation, said, "I've heard that the FBI can take a sample of mud from a man's shoes and tell just what part of the country it came from."

"That is true," replied Tom's father. "The scientists in the FBI laboratory can take microsopic specks of tobacco from a man's pocket and tell what kind of cigarettes he smokes. In some cases the dust from a suit of clothes will enable technicians to determine the city in which the suit was worn."

"I should think," said Whiz, "it would be easier to work on that uranium rock in the FBI laboratory. All the facilities are there, and—"

"The facilities I'll need," replied Quest, "I'll take

with me to Bosworth's home." He chuckled softly. "When you see the last slide, which I'm about to show you, you'll see the important clue that I have to work with."

Quest placed the slide in the projector. "Before I turn on the switch," he said, "I must explain that the gold medallion was set into a hollowed-out pocket in the stone. I pried it out of this pocket with a knife to see if anything had been cut into the back. This slide shows you the reverse side of the gold piece."

He flicked the switch.

The color picture of the gold charm nearly filled the screen. Now, instead of showing the image of the sun, which had been carved on the front of the medallion, the surface showed a number of small scratches which had a vague resemblance to the shorthand notes of a stenographer. Some of the marks appeared to be deeply cut and others were so light that they were hardly discernible.

"What's that?" asked Whiz Walton.

"It is ancient writing," replied the scientist. "It will take a little time to bring out the fainter lines and more time to translate the message. But I am sure that the message, when translated, will help us learn where that charm was made."

"Do you think the rock came from the same place?"

"I consider that a fair assumption."

Quest turned off the projector, and Tom turned on the lamps.

"Now," said Hamilton Quest to Whiz and Gulliver, "you know where we are going and why we are going there, and you realize the importance of keeping our mission a secret."

CHAPTER 5

Bosworth Island

JOHN BOSWORTH stood at the gate watching the chartered plane come in against the wind, land at the airport near Alexandria Bay, and taxi along the ground.

"That's the plane you've been waiting for, Mr. Bosworth," said an attendant.

Bosworth looked at his watch. "Just five minutes before noon," he said. "They made good time from New York."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed the attendant suddenly. "Look at the man getting out of that plane!"

The man was well over six feet in height. He had massive shoulders and a chest of barrel-like proportions.

"He's big!" said the attendant. "Don't tell me he's the scientist you're here to meet?"

"No," grinned Bosworth. "That must be his friend, Gulliver. Quest told me about him and about his newspaper friend."

A slim man wearing a gray, snap-brim hat and a beautifully tailored pinstripe suit stepped down. "Whiz Walton," said Bosworth.

"The writer?"

"Yes."

"Is he going to stay at your place, Mr. Bosworth?"

"Yes."

"It must be great," said the attendant somewhat wistfully, "to know all kinds of famous people like you do."

"There's Hamilton Quest." Ignoring the rules, Bosworth pushed through the gate and hurried toward the halted plane. "Hi, Quest," he called.

"Hello, Bosworth!" The two men shook hands. "I want you to know the friends I mentioned. Whiz Walton, Mr. Bosworth."

"How do you do," said Whiz.

"I've heard about you, Whiz, and read a lot of your stuff. It's good."

"Thanks," smiled the columnist.

Quest introduced Gulliver.

Bosworth was a big man, strong and athletic. But as he gripped the massive hand of Gulliver, he felt almost puny. "I've been looking forward to meeting you, Gulliver," he said. "Quest told me how you used to wrestle wild steers, bucking bronchos, and tough mules."

"Aw, that was only for practice," Gulliver explained, "so's I could hold my own when I tangled with buffalo."

"Ever play football?"

"Nope," replied the big man.

"Stand by for the luggage," Tom called from the doorway of the plane.

"Toss 'er out," cried Gulliver. "I'll catch it."

"Hey!" yelled Whiz Walton as a black box arced down. "That's my typewriter!"

Gulliver caught it in one hand and handed it to the columnist. "It ain't hurt," he said.

Four suitcases followed. Then Tom handed down a steel case that held his father's microscope and other apparatus as well as chemicals that would be used during the stay at Bosworth Island.

"Here comes my car," said Bosworth. A chauffeur-driven station wagon came onto the field and halted beside the group of men and luggage.

When the driver opened the rear panel, Tom and

Gulliver placed the luggage on board, then climbed inside to join the others, who had already taken seats.

"How d'yo' git this car to yo' island?" asked Gulliver.

"We'll leave the car on the mainland," Bosworth explained, as they drove away from the airport.

Alexandria Bay, the mainland town nearest the islands, consisted of little more than one short street connecting two inlets from the St. Lawrence River. At each end of the street, there were literally hundreds of boats, ranging in size from tiny skiffs to luxurious cruisers. And there were many long, sleek, sightseeing boats operating on regular schedules to conduct visitors on water tours of the islands. Hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops lined both sides of the street.

During the ride to Bosworth's mainland garage, the millionaire talked about the chain of islands. "Actually," he said, "there are many more than a thousand of them. There are closer to three thousand. Some are barely large enough to stand on, while others have an area of more than half a hundred acres. They dot the river for many miles in both directions."

"Where's the boundary line between the United States and Canada?" asked Tom.

"About the middle of the river. Some of the islands are American; others are under Canadian control."

The driver turned the station wagon off the road into a driveway. As it approached a building on the riverbank, wide doors swung open.

"Electric eye," explained Bosworth. "This is my garage."

The garage was large enough to hold about a dozen cars, but there were only five there at the time, counting the station wagon.

"Some garage," said Whiz Walton. "You must have a fleet of cars."

"No," replied Bosworth. "In addition to the station wagon, I own only that Cadillac." He pointed to a shiny black limousine, then to a Lincoln convertible. "That's my wife's. The Buick belongs to Henry Weaver, my attorney."

"Tom and I met him when we were here the last time," said Hamilton Quest.

"So you did. I—" Bosworth broke off sharply as his eyes fell on a gray Jaguar with a coat of arms painted on the side. He muttered a bit of profanity.

"What's wrong?" asked Quest.

Bosworth pointed to the sports car. "That belongs to Forbes Blaine. I didn't expect him to be here."

"Who is he?" asked Quest.

"He is the perennially eligible bachelor. The typical man-about-town."

"I've bumped into him a few times in New York," Whiz said. "He seems like a harmless character."

"Harmless and worthless," frowned Bosworth. "He knows the rules of behavior and has the clothes for any occasion, but I've never known him to do anything."

"Doesn't he work?" asked Tom.

"He promotes, Tom," replied Bosworth. "He has many wealthy acquaintances who are looking for speculative investments. He also knows many writers, producers, and actors who are seeking backing for a play or movie. He's generally able to raise the financial backing for one of these enterprises and cuts himself in for a block of stock for his services. Every so often, one of his deals pays off, then he collects."

"Nice work," muttered Whiz, "if you can get it."

"I can't imagine why he's here. I didn't invite him."

"Maybe Margaret invited him," suggested Hamilton Quest.

"That's impossible, Quest. My wife doesn't know the man. Oh well," Bosworth shrugged his heavy shoulders, "I suppose we'll find out why he came when we get to the island."

During the discussion about the cars and Forbes Blaine, the chauffeur had unloaded the luggage and taken it down a flight of stairs. From below came the sound of a powerful marine engine being started.

"It sounds," said Bosworth, "as if the boat is ready. Let's go below."

Beneath the garage there were several slips divided by platforms. In three of these, boats floated. The chauffeur sat at the wheel of a power-packed speedboat whose engine was turning over softly.

As soon as the passengers were comfortably seated,

the chauffeur moved the throttle and the fast boat eased out into the St. Lawrence River.

During the boat ride, Bosworth pointed out places of special interest. He showed his guests the famous Boldt Castle, which had been built by a millionaire as a duplicate of an old Rhine River castle in Germany. It was an amazing pile of red stone consisting of over three hundred rooms. Bosworth told the touching story of the multimillionaire named Boldt and his dream castle, built as a gift to his wife. According to the story, the exterior of the building was complete when Mrs. Boldt died. In his grief, Boldt had halted all work on the interior and abandoned the project. It was now a tourist attraction, open to visitors at fifty cents a head.

On another island, an imaginative builder had created a Swiss chalet. And there were many more interesting examples of the architects' craft.

After a run of about six miles, Bosworth pointed out his own private domain. It was a large island covered with grass and tastefully landscaped. The house was low and rambling. It was an unpretentious place, obviously built for easy living rather than show purposes. Beyond the house there was a tennis court beside which, on the grass, stood an archery target.

Two boats were tied to one end of the wide dock, and on the other end a boathouse and diving platform had been built.

"This is it," said Bosworth, stepping to the dock. "I want you to make yourselves at home. If you care to

swim, you'll find an assortment of swimsuits in the bathhouse. There's a complete range of sizes." He smiled at Gulliver. "But I doubt that there's one to fit you."

"I'd rather fish than swim."

"You'll find fishing tackle in the game room. Help yourself. There's good fishing off the end of the dock, but if you'd rather use a boat, take any one that's handy."

"Hi, Bosworth!" It was a raucous voice that shouted.

"Oh, no!" moaned Bosworth as he saw a stocky woman waving her hand from the door of the house. "That woman's here again."

"Who is she?" asked Whiz.

"Clara Nugent. She's one of my wife's friends."

Miss Nugent was coming toward the dock with long strides. She wore sensible shoes and a tailored suit that was much too small for her dumpy figure. Her gray hair was cut so short that it bristled in all directions.

"She's a writer," explained Bosworth. "She specializes in rough-and-tumble detective stories for pulp magazines and radio programs."

"How's the pride of dear old Harvard?" asked Clara Nugent heartily as she stepped to the dock with her hand extended.

"I'm fine, Clara," Bosworth said politely. "I want you to meet my friends." He introduced Quest, then Tom. Tom found the woman's handclasp firm and sincere.

"And this is Mr. Walton."

"Whiz," said Miss Nugent. "Boy, I'm glad to meet you." She looked at Gulliver and said, "Wow!"

"Mr. Gulliver."

"Howdy, ma'am."

"Like I just said, 'Wow!' Where you from, Gulliver?"

"Me, I been lots o' places."

"He's from Texas," said Tom.

"I've always heard that Texas men were tall in the saddle. You're living proof of it." The radio writer dropped her voice and spoke in a poor imitation of a Texas drawl. "What'd they feed yuh, pahdner?"

Bosworth felt uneasy and hoped that Gulliver wouldn't be embarrassed or take offense at Clara Nugent's breezy manner. But he was reassured when the big man spoke.

"Ma'am," Gulliver said seriously, "what yo' heard about Texans bein' tall in the saddle ain't fiction. Where I come from, half o' the fellers called me 'Shorty.' "

"Touché!" laughed Clara. "You say half the fellows called you 'Shorty.' I'm supposed to ask what the rest of the boys called you, eh?"

"No, ma'am. The others didn't call me anythin' at all. They wouldn't speak to me because I was so pulin' weak."

"Good boy, Gulliver!" said Clara Nugent. "You've clipped my horns." She spoke to Bosworth. "You've got another house guest, Bosworth."

"Forbes Blaine?"

"Uh-huh."

"I saw his car—with the Blaine coat of arms on the side. Did you bring him?"

"Right. But not because I like him. I'm trying to get him interested in a play I wrote. If he likes it, he'll find backers to put it into production. Oh! I almost forgot. I came from the house to tell you that a man named Hall telephoned."

"Hall?" said Bosworth questioningly.

"C. Hollis Hall. Don't you know him?"

"The name is not familiar."

"It's all right," said Hamilton Quest. "His name was given to me yesterday in Washington. He is the 'observer.'"

"Oh, yes. I understand."

Clara Nugent spoke again. "He called from the railroad station at the Bay. Margaret told him to get a cab and tell the driver to take him to your garage. She said someone would pick him up there."

"Did you hear that, Charlie?" said Bosworth to the chauffeur, who had been lifting the luggage from the boat to the dock.

"Yes, sir. I'll go back to the mainland for Mr. Hall as soon as I take these suitcases to the house."

"We can take our own things," said Whiz.

The others agreed.

Gulliver picked up Hamilton Quest's luggage as well as his own.

Bosworth led the way with Clara Nugent at his side. The others followed along the flagstone walk as the fast power boat left the dock and sped away with a great water spray rising on her sides.

CHAPTER 6

Assembly

BENTLEY, the butler, a tall, thin man with a bald head and an expressionless face, met the guests in the central hall.

"Leave your luggage right here," said Bosworth. "Bentley will bring it to your rooms." To Clara Nugent, he said, "Where are the others?"

"Margaret's taking a nap," the writer said. "Weaver is working in the library, and Forbes Blaine went for a walk."

"You'll meet them later," Bosworth said.

"You'll see me later, too," said Miss Nugent. "I'm going up to my room and do a little work." She strode across the flagstone floor of the big hall and went up the stairs at the far end.

The hall extended straight through the house with French doors at the far end, opening into a patio. On the second floor there were a couple of guest rooms as well as the family suite.

An arch on the left side of the hall opened into a huge, bright dining room, beyond which could be seen a sunporch. From the dining room, at right angles to the front of the building, a one-story wing extended along one side of the patio. In this were the kitchen, utility rooms, and the rooms occupied by a maid, Bentley, and Bentley's wife, who did the cooking.

The dining room was balanced by a tastefully furnished living room on the right side of the central hall. This room had a huge, fieldstone fireplace and a floor of random width boards pegged down. Tom noticed that the oak door at the far end of the living room, which opened into Bosworth's library, was closed.

A wing, similar to the one opening from the dining room, extended back from the living room. A corridor extended the entire length of this wing, with bedrooms on both sides.

Bentley had apparently been given instructions regarding the sleeping arrangements, for without being spoken to by Bosworth, he opened the first door on the left-hand side of the corridor.

The bedroom was large and had twin beds.

"Mr. Gulliver and Mr. Walton," Bentley said in a well-modulated voice.

"I thought Gulliver was to have the room across the hall," said Bosworth.

"Mr. Blaine is there, sir."

"Oh, yes. I hadn't counted on him."

"And you told me there would be another guest, sir. He is to occupy the room adjoining Mr. Blaine's."

Bosworth nodded. "I hope you two won't mind doubling up," he said.

"Not at all," replied Whiz Walton.

Tom Quest was assigned to the next room, which was connected to Whiz and Gulliver's by a gleaming bathroom.

The third and last room on the left side of the corridor was placed at the disposal of Hamilton Quest. This was a big room with an adjoining bathroom. French doors opened from the room to the patio.

"Quest," said Bosworth, "I knew you'd want to work in your room, so I had a big table brought in." He pointed to a massive oak table that stood against one wall. "Will that be large enough for your microscope and the other things you'll be using?"

"It will do splendidly."

"Mr. Weaver has the mate to this room directly across the corridor."

Bentley adjusted the Venetian blinds on the windows, then said, "I'll bring your luggage in directly, Mr. Quest. Do you wish me to assist you in unpacking?"

"Oh, no thanks, Bentley."

"Bentley," said Bosworth, "Charlie's gone to the mainland to get our other guest. His name is Hall."

"Very good, sir."

"And by the way, how about luncheon?"

"A buffet will be ready in a few minutes."

"Fine!"

Gulliver's two-suiter held, in addition to his clothing, his favorite six-gun, a supply of ammunition, and a well-equipped first-aid kit.

"You expecting trouble?" asked Whiz Walton.

"I'm not expectin' it," the big man replied, "but if it comes along, I'm goin' to be geared to meet it."

The two men had just finished putting away their clothes when Tom Quest rapped on the door, then entered the room. "What do you think of this house?" he asked.

"What a spread!" exclaimed Whiz Walton.

"The house is all right," commented Gulliver, "but there ain't enough land around it."

"Six acres?"

"Shucks! My house in Texas is only half this big, an' I got close to six thousand acres around it."

"I noticed a small cottage off to one side of the tennis court," Whiz said. "Who lives there?"

"The gardener and his wife," Tom said.

"How many does Bosworth have at work to maintain this place?"

"That's all. Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, the gardener and his wife, the maid, and Charlie, who takes care of the boats and cars."

"Where does Charlie sleep?" Whiz inquired.

"He has a room in the cottage."

"That many people," said Gulliver, unimpressed, "could handle a fair-sized string o' cattle."

Whiz said, "I'm half-starved. You've been here before, Tom. How do we know when it's time to eat?"

"They'll ring a bell."

"I hope it's soon."

"How's yo' dad gittin' on, Tom? Does he need help unpackin' all that gear he brought along?"

"No. I stopped in his room before I came here. He's not going to unpack any of his equipment until later. He'll join us here in your room as soon as he puts away his clothes."

Daniel Weaver appeared at the open door. He was a short man, with a large stomach and a pompous manner. He carried a thick cigar in a pudgy hand and held it in the way that best displayed a diamond ring on his little finger.

"Hello, Tom," he said in a resonant voice.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Weaver." Tom advanced to shake hands.

"I have heard about your friends, but I have not had the pleasure of meeting them."

Tom introduced Whiz and Gulliver, who shook hands with the round-faced counselor.

"Have you seen Dad?" asked Tom.

"Not as yet."

A bell rang musically.

"Is that it?" asked Whiz. "The dinner bell?"

"That's it," laughed Tom.

"Let's go eat," said Gulliver.

Neither Mrs. Bosworth nor Clara Nugent appeared at luncheon, which was spread out on a long table in the patio. Bosworth invited each of the guests to take a plate and help himself to food which, even Gulliver admitted, was good. There was an assortment of rolls and breads, cold meats, and several different kinds of cheese, as well as a huge wooden bowl full of salad. To drink there were pitchers of milk and iced tea.

Gulliver was working on his fourth thick sandwich when Forbes Blaine came striding across the lawn toward the open end of the patio. He was a well-built man in his middle forties and good looking. His perfectly tailored slacks and sport jacket were a harmonious blend of browns that went well with his tanned complexion and brown eyes. His hair was dark and sleek, graying at the temples. He smiled affably, show-

ing teeth that were too white and perfect to be natural as he shook hands during introductions.

"Had I known you were expecting so many guests," he said to Bosworth, "I would not have come here at this time."

"It's all right, Blaine," Bosworth said politely. "If you'll not expect too much of me as a host. We'll be pretty busy during the next few days."

"As a host," smiled Blaine, "you are superb! You've provided everything for recreation. If one cannot put in the time pleasantly without disturbing you, one doesn't deserve to be here."

Bentley appeared at the door, placed the back of his hand close to his mouth, and said, "Har-rumph," to get Bosworth's attention.

"What is it, Bentley?"

"Mr. Hall has arrived, sir. I've shown him to his room."

"Ask him to join us here."

"I told him where you are, sir, and he said he would be out directly."

A moment later, a tall, very thin man came into the patio. He seemed to be about thirty-five years old. His hair above a broad, high forehead was blond and thin. His skin was practically colorless and his blue eyes had a washed-out, watery appearance. He looked like a scholarly man who had spent most of his life indoors.

"Now that we're all here," said Bosworth, after

everyone had shaken hands with the observer from the AEC, "I'll suggest a program. Some of you are here for the first time. I'm rather proud of this place and I'd like to show it to you. I suggest that we spend the afternoon getting acquainted, going over the grounds, and having a swim—or tennis, if you prefer. My wife and Miss Nugent will join us for dinner. After dinner, Blaine will probably play cards with the ladies while the rest of us go into the library for a—a demonstration, and a conference. Is that agreeable?"

"It sounds like a splendid plan," said Hamilton Quest. "But inasmuch as I've been all over the place, Bosworth, I'll unpack my chemicals and equipment and get set up for work while the rest of you go on the sightseeing tour."

"Good! Do you want anyone to help you, Hamilton?"

"I'll help Dad," said Tom.

With no further revisions, Bosworth's plans were carried out.

CHAPTER 7

Mrs. Bosworth

"It was thoughtful of Bosworth to have this table brought into the room," said Hamilton Quest as he unlocked the chest of equipment he had brought to the millionaire's estate.

"He probably knew you'd want to work privately," replied Tom.

From the open chest, Hamilton Quest took an extension cord and handed it to Tom. "There's an electric outlet in the baseboard beneath the table," he said. "Plug this in, will you, son?"

"Sure!" Tom dropped to his knees. "How much electrical equipment did you bring, Dad?"

"Only a few lights. Infra-red, ultraviolet, and a lamp to light the stage of my microscope." While he spoke, the scientist removed the lamps from their protective containers. He placed them on the table, then took out the polished wooden case that held his valuable microscope with its three lenses, one of which was of the high-powered oil-immersion type.

"Shall I set up the 'scope?"

"Not now, Tom. I'll leave it in the case until I'm ready to use it. But you might hand me the rest of the things. I'll set them out on the worktable."

In addition to other scientific apparatus and a number of tightly stoppered bottles that held chemicals, Tom handed his father a small camera that took colored pictures and a large camera designed to make extremely sharp close-up photographs. Also a portable typewriter with a supply of paper, several heavy reference books, and last of all, a bulky, red fiber envelope. "What's in this?" Tom asked.

"Photographs."

"Of what?"

"Mostly the ruins of early Inca buildings."

"What are you going to do with them?"

Quest smiled enigmatically. "They may," he said, "come in handy. I have tried to bring with me everything that could conceivably help in any way in tracing the radioactive stone to its place of origin."

There was a light rap on the door.

"Come in," called Hamilton Quest.

Mrs. Bosworth entered.

"Margaret!" said Quest. "I'm glad to see you."

"Welcome, Hamilton." The tall, slender lady smiled, extending her hand. "And you too, Tom."

"It's nice to see you again, Mrs. Bosworth." Tom thought he had never seen a finer looking woman, nor one with a more stately bearing. She was the type that came to one's mind in connection with the word 'aristocrat.'

"I came to say 'Hello,' and to apologize for not being on hand to welcome you when you arrived."

"No apology is necessary," Tom's father assured her.

"Do you know where John and the others have gone?"

"I believe they went for a walk to look over the island," replied Tom's father.

"Oh."

"Tom and I stayed here to unpack this equipment."

Mrs. Bosworth looked at the table. "My word!" she exclaimed. "What are you going to do? Try to split a few atoms?"

"Hardly that," laughed Quest.

Mrs. Bosworth didn't seem to notice that her question had not been answered. Perhaps she didn't expect an answer. She said, "John told me yesterday that Mr. Gulliver might come with you. Did he?"

"Yes," replied Quest. "Didn't Miss Nugent tell you?"

"No," said Mrs. Bosworth. "I have not seen her since this morning. When I passed her room a moment ago, the door was closed and I heard her typing, so I didn't disturb her."

"Gulliver came with us, and so did Whiz Walton."

"The famous newspaper writer?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad! I've read his stories about the trips with Tom and Mr. Gulliver. Now, at last, I shall have the opportunity to meet both of your interesting friends."

"Miss Nugent was certainly impressed by Gulliver," said Tom, chuckling.

Surprisingly, Mrs. Bosworth frowned. "I," she said, "am terribly annoyed with Clara Nugent."

Hamilton Quest looked surprised.

"She phoned a few days ago and asked if it would be convenient for her to visit us this week end. I know her well enough to be quite frank, so I told her that it would not be convenient. I explained that my husband expected a number of house guests in connection with a business matter and asked her to come another time. In spite of that, she arrived unexpectedly this morning and brought Forbes Blaine with her."

"Perhaps she misunderstood you," said Quest.

"She did *not* misunderstand me. She explained that Mr. Blaine had expressed a desire to see our island and this was the only week end he had free for several weeks. So she came and brought him in spite of what I'd told her."

"Well, of course— If she's interested in Blaine—"

"She is interested in what he can do," replied Margaret Bosworth. "Clara Nugent has changed in the past year. She's become terribly—well, I think 'greedy' is the word. And ambitious. She used to be easygoing, and a lot of fun. Now—well, she's a different person. She's no longer satisfied with a fair income from the work she can do well. She is trying to write a Broadway play, and hopes Forbes Blaine will raise the capital to produce it."

Tom and his father remained silent.

"Forgive me," Mrs. Bosworth said, "for speaking this way. I—I shouldn't have talked so about one of my oldest friends. But I've been so annoyed, I—I simply had to let off a little steam."

Quest smiled. "It does one good to let off steam," he said.

"Clara may not realize how much she has changed. I intend to have a heart-to-heart talk with her at the first opportunity. It may do her good."

"It may," replied Hamilton Quest.

Mrs. Bosworth looked into the corridor, then gently closed the door. She crossed the room, looked through the French windows into the patio, and murmured,

"No one's around. We can talk without being overheard." She sat down in a big leather chair, smiled nervously at Tom, then looked levelly at Quest.

"Hamilton," she said, "you've been our friend, John's and mine, for a long time."

"Yes, Margaret," agreed the older man.

"Because of that friendship, I'm going to ask you a question and I want a straight answer."

"What is the question?"

"What's wrong with my husband?"

"I didn't know that anything was wrong with him. I think he looks very well."

"Is he in trouble?"

"Not that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"What happened when you and Tom were here a few weeks ago?"

"Well—" Hamilton Quest paused. "Didn't John tell you why we came here?"

"No. But ever since you left, he's been nervous and uneasy. Several times he's talked in his sleep. He's never done that before."

"What has he talked about?"

"He just mumbles. Most of it is unintelligible, but a couple of times, he's mentioned the words, 'Top secret.' What did he mean by that?"

"Have you asked him?"

"Yes. He just laughed and told me to forget it."

"Your husband is an important man, Margaret. He has many big commercial interests. He's on the board

of directors of several multimillion-dollar corporations, and from time to time, he's called on to make decisions that affect the lives of many people. Now it stands to reason that if he is facing a situation of this type—"

"It's nothing like that," interrupted Mrs. Bosworth. "He's been an important man for many years. During that time he has had to make a lot of big decisions. But he's taken things of that sort in stride. He's never let them worry him. Now, I know he's worried."

"Well—"

"It began the last time you were here," Margaret Bosworth continued. "After you and Tom left, John barely spoke to me. He was tense and preoccupied. That night he scarcely slept a wink. He and Mr. Weaver, his attorney, spent all the next day in the library, with the door closed.

"The next morning I went into the library and noticed that an old Inca relic was missing from the pedestal where it had stood for years. I asked John about it and he said he'd gotten tired of looking at it and had put it away. He seemed terribly annoyed when I asked him where he had put it, but finally he said he'd locked it up in a vault that's built into one wall of the library."

Hamilton Quest nodded slowly.

"I know the luck piece that's mounted on that stone is made of solid gold, but it's hardly so valuable that it has to be put into the vault with the rare first editions that my husband has collected and my best jewelry. I told John that if he didn't want the Inca stone in the

library, I'd like to move it somewhere else. He looked at me for a moment as if he were about to tell me something. Then I guess he changed his mind. He said he didn't care to talk about the Inca stone."

"Have you talked to John about it since that time?"

"Just once. The day after he had locked it in the vault, I asked him if it had more value than we had supposed. He told me he did not care to discuss the stone or medallion in any way.

"A few days later, I went to New York to do some shopping. I met Clara Nugent and told her about John's strange behavior. She was, of course, very interested. She took me to the office of a newspaper that had once published a picture of the relic. We got a copy of the photograph and took it to a friend of Clara's who is a curator in a museum. He looked at the picture and said he was familiar with the piece. He said it was an interesting relic, but had no great value either intrinsically or historically.

"Hamilton, why did John lock it in the vault, and why is he so disturbed?"

"I'd like to tell you, Margaret—"

"Then you *do* know?"

Quest nodded. "I know, but inasmuch as John has not confided in you, I think it would be unfair to him if I were to do so."

"Oh, you—" cried Mrs. Bosworth.

"I'm sure he doesn't realize that you are worried about him. If he did, he'd probably tell you all about

the old relic. Then you'd know there really is no cause for concern."

"Then why is my husband concerned?"

"Probably for the same reason I would be concerned if I were to become involved in one of his big business deals. He's quite at ease in the business world, but he feels inadequate to cope with things of archeological importance, just as I'd feel lost in the railroad business."

"Now," said Mrs. Bosworth, rising, "I am more at sea than ever."

"I'm going to tell John that I think you should be taken into our little secret."

"No, no, please don't!"

"Why not?"

"He'd know you did it because I asked you to, and he'd be terribly angry. No, Hamilton, I don't want him to know that I spoke to you."

"Very well, Margaret. I'll say nothing."

"Before I leave, please tell me just one thing."

"What is it?"

"Did you, Tom, and the others come here this time in connection with the Inca stone?"

"Yes," replied Quest. "We did."

"Thank you." Mrs. Bosworth left the room.

For a moment Hamilton Quest frowned at the closed door. "I am afraid," he murmured, "I'm to blame for that."

"Why are you to blame, Dad?" asked Tom.

"I may have been too emphatic in telling Bosworth

the importance of keeping secret the discovery that the stone is rich in uranium."

"Do you think Mr. Bosworth is afraid his wife will spread the news?"

"No. I think it is just as I told her. He doesn't realize that she is concerned. Women like her, son, are able to hide their emotions."

"She told Clara Nugent that something was cooking in connection with the stone."

"Yes. I'm sorry about that."

"Do you think that's why Miss Nugent came here today?"

"It's possible."

"I wonder if she said anything to Forbes Blaine about it."

"I'm wondering the same thing, Tom." Hamilton Quest stood up and removed his coat. "I think I'll take a little nap," he said.

"All right, Dad. I'll go for a swim. I'll see you later."

CHAPTER 8

Bosworth's Demonstration

DURING DINNER, expertly served by Bentley, wearing a white coat, Tom Quest saw an example of what his father had said about women of Mrs. Bosworth's type being able to hide their emotions.

Seated at one end of the long table, the lady appeared

to have not a care in the world. She was smiling, chatty, and quite at ease. She kept the conversation going, and carried on an amusing banter with several of the guests.

Tom noticed that Bosworth had little interest in the splendidly prepared meal. He seemed preoccupied as he toyed with each course, saying little.

C. Hollis Hall was an equally light eater, but an interesting conversationalist. The rest of the diners, particularly Weaver and Gulliver, did full justice to the meal.

Coffee was served at the table. When everyone seemed finished, Mrs. Bosworth turned to Clara Nugent. "Perhaps you and Mr. Blaine would like to join me in Canasta while the others retire to the library for their meeting."

"I'd like to," replied the writer, "but Forbes Blaine has promised to listen to my play. I'd better read it to him before he changes his mind."

"Oh, fine," smiled Mrs. Bosworth.

Blaine said, "If it is as good as Clara claims, we should have no trouble finding the backers to produce it."

"You must read it to Mr. Blaine by all means, Clara."

"Do you want to listen to it, Margaret?"

"No thanks, Clara. I'd rather wait and see it on the stage. I'll go upstairs and watch television."

Miss Nugent turned to Blaine. "We don't want to disturb anyone," she said. "I guess the sunporch will be a good place to do the reading."

"Wherever you say," Forbes Blaine replied.

Bosworth cleared his throat. "If no one wants more coffee," he said, "let's go into the library."

As everyone rose from the table, Tom stepped to his father's side and spoke softly. "Do you think I should go into the library with you?"

"Of course, Tom. Why not?"

"Well, if Mr. Bosworth didn't mention anything to his wife—"

"He knows you're aware of the situation. You come right along with us."

The library was nearly as large as the living room. A massive desk stood near the wall opposite the door, and the wall behind the desk was made up of bookshelves from floor to ceiling. These shelves, as well as similar ones on both sides of the door, were filled with beautifully bound books, many of them collector's items. The side walls of the room were paneled with walnut. In each of these walls there were two drapery-covered pairs of French doors. Between the doors on one side, a vault had been set in so the door was flush with the walnut paneling. A teakwood pedestal stood between the casements on the opposite side.

On his last visit, Tom had seen the Inca stone on this pedestal. But now the top was bare.

Bosworth closed the door and locked it. Motioning to the leather davenport and chairs, he said, "Please sit down."

Gulliver sat down on the davenport, filling space

that would accommodate two people of average size. Tom sat next to him. Weaver lowered his bulk into a wide chair, took a thick cigar from his pocket, and lighted it with a solid gold lighter. Whiz Walton and Hamilton Quest sat side by side near the empty pedestal, and C. Hollis Hall took a chair across the room.

"I think," said Bosworth, standing in front of his desk, "we all know why we are here."

"Just a moment, Mr. Bosworth," the observer from the Atomic Energy Commission said. "I'm a stranger to all of you." He reached into the inner pocket of his coat and drew out a leather folder. "It is customary for men in our department to identify themselves. I did not do it earlier, because there were others around who were unaware of my official capacity. Now, however, I wish to show you my credentials." He handed the folder to Bosworth.

Bosworth examined the cards of identification, and a letter of authority signed by a high official. "This," he said, "appears to be satisfactory." He handed it to Tom's father. "You'd better look at it."

Quest read the letter, studied the identification, and nodded.

"May I see it?" asked Weaver.

Quest passed the identification to the attorney. Weaver examined it, then returned the folder to its owner. "You are here, Mr. Hall, as a representative of the AEC to observe and report the findings of Mr. Quest," he said.

"That is correct."

"You have probably been told how we recently learned that a rock specimen known to have come from Peru is rich in uranium?" The lawyer's inflection made a question of the speech.

Hall nodded.

"And that, presumably, an extensive deposit of uranium bearing ore might be found in the place where the specimen was picked up?"

"Yes, Mr. Weaver. And I understand that Mr. Quest, working with official sanction, is to study the specimen in an effort to determine exactly where it came from."

Weaver nodded.

"Are the other gentlemen here—uh—officially?" asked Hall.

"They are here because I brought them," replied Quest shortly.

"Yo' got any objections?" scowled Gulliver.

"It is not within my province to object to anything. I was sent here merely to observe and to report." Hall looked around the room. "Where is this specimen of rock?"

Bosworth said, "In my vault. I'll get it." He squatted before the steel door in the wall and placed his fingers on the dial.

"You keep it in a vault?"

"I have, since we learned of its importance." Bosworth turned the dial to the right.

"Did you think someone might try to steal it?"

"Yes." Bosworth turned the dial to the left.

Hall, the observer, seemed to be amused. "You must have been misinformed about the value of a few pounds of uranium ore."

Bosworth paused in the dialing of the vault's combination. He looked at Hall and said, "I know precisely what the ore is worth. The specimen we have here may be worth very little for its uranium content, but as a clue to the location of a uranium mine in Peru, it has value that cannot be measured in dollars and cents."

Weaver cleared his throat. "Mr. Hall," he said, "Mr. Bosworth locked up the specimen on advice of counsel."

Hall shrugged his shoulders. "As I said, I am here only to observe."

"Furthermore," continued Bosworth's attorney, "I made a strong point of the importance of secrecy. Communist agents would be very glad to get their hands on the Inca stone."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Weaver?"

"I do! As I told Mr. Bosworth, the Reds undoubtedly have scientists capable of tracing the specimen to a Peruvian deposit. Working secretly, they could locate the deposit, then make a deal with the government of Peru. A deal that would do the United States no good!"

Gulliver muttered, "I'd like to catch a couple o' them

Reds coyotin' around here. I'd make 'em wish they'd never been born."

Bosworth swung open the vault door, reached inside, and brought out the Inca relic.

"I'll take it," said Tom, crossing the library.

"You know where it was, Tom. Place it on the pedestal." Bosworth closed and locked the vault.

The triangular rock on which the gold medallion was mounted rested on a slab of roughly hewed wood.

From a drawer of his desk, Bosworth brought out a Geiger counter to register and measure radioactivity. "This," he said, "is so sensitive that it is affected by the minute amount of radioactive salt in a luminous watch. Are any of you wearing watches that glow in the dark?"

No one was.

"Now listen, when I turn on the Geiger counter." As Bosworth flicked the switch, a rhythmic clicking came from the instrument. "Even when I stand here near the desk, the instrument indicates the radioactivity coming from the stone. And as I approach the stone—" He moved toward the pedestal with the instrument held in front of his body.

The clicks came closer and closer together until, when the counter was within a few inches of the Inca relic, there was a steady, unbroken hum.

Fascinated by the demonstration, the men left their chairs and gathered close to the pedestal.

"Look!" said Bosworth, pointing to the scale on the Geiger counter. "See where the needle points?"

"There is no doubt that the rock is highly radioactive," observed C. Hollis Hall. "Are you sure the emanations come from uranium?"

"We're sure," said Bosworth.

Tom Quest said, "Dad tested it."

CHAPTER 9

Quest's Logic

Tom Quest and the six older men were gathered close together near the pedestal, observing the high degree of radiation shown by the scale on the Geiger counter. The humming stopped as Bosworth turned off the instrument.

"I," said C. Hollis Hall, "am satisfied that Mr. Quest's tests establish beyond doubt that this rock contains uranium." He turned to Tom's father. "I am interested in several branches of science," he said. "I've studied chemistry and physics as well as a number of others, but I know nothing about geology or archeology. Would you mind telling me how you will proceed in your effort to determine where this specimen came from?"

"Not at all," replied Quest. He took a penknife from his pocket, opened a blade, and pried out the gold medallion which was about five inches in diameter and about a quarter of an inch in thickness. "Look on the reverse side of this gold piece." He handed it to Hall.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" exclaimed the observer as the gold piece slipped from his fingers. He bent quickly and picked it up from the carpeted floor. "Clumsy of me." He eyed the piece, then turned it over.

"Notice the scratches?" asked Quest.

"Yes."

"Let's see them," said Whiz, crowding close to Hall.

"Me, too," put in Gulliver. "Looks like bug tracks," he observed a moment later.

"Do these marks mean anything to you, Mr. Quest?" asked Hall.

"They mean something and I hope they will mean a great deal more. Many of those scratches are so faint, they're almost indiscernible. But by the use of special

lights and acids, I think I can bring them out more clearly."

"Is it some kind of writing?"

"Yes. I have already examined it enough to know that it was done by an Inca Indian. It is a combination of words and picture writing."

"If translated, do you think it will tell where the rock came from?"

"I think it will tell where the gold medallion was made and we may assume that the rock came from the same area. However, I'm not basing my hopes on the interpretation of that writing. I shall work along another line as well."

"What is that?"

"The rock itself. Notice how it is set on the wooden base, with the longest of the three sides facing the front?"

"Yes."

Quest lifted the stone off the wooden base. "When I turn it so it rests on the long side, the other two sides, formerly the base and the back, now form an isosceles triangle."

"Has that any special significance?"

"I think so. To me it indicates that this stone was *not* shaped expressly to support the gold charm. I think the stone was originally cut in this shape for use in a building. Perhaps an Inca temple. The ancient craftsman, having completed his work on the gold, needed

a stone for a mounting. He found one already cut that suited his purpose, and used it."

"Is there anything to support that theory?"

"Yes, there is," smiled Hamilton Quest. "So that you will better understand what I am about to demonstrate, I'd like to remind you that even today each tool has its identifying marks. Typing, for example, can be unmistakably identified as having come from a specific typewriter. Woodworking tools, such as saws, chisels, and planes, have defects, sometimes visible only under a microscope, which make possible the identification of work done by them."

"The same," put in Whiz Walton, "as the way a bullet can be traced to a certain gun."

"Yes, Whiz. The same idea. Now let us consider the human element. Even today, in the machine age, there are certain types of work that can be done only by skilled craftsmen using simple hand tools. The cutting and polishing of gems, for instance, or engraving. Also woodcarving, painting, and many others I could mention. An expert, looking at a painting, can easily identify the brushwork of the artist, just as some of the experts in Washington can point to one of the engraved plates used for the printing of currency, and name the man who did the engraving."

"I see what you mean," said C. Hollis Hall. "You've made your point quite clear."

"Then let me apply it to this rock." Quest returned

the stone to its original position and pointed to the circular nest where the gold charm had been.

"Even without a magnifying glass, you can see that the cutting of this pocket has a character entirely different from the chipping that was done to shape the stone into the triangular form."

"Very good!" exclaimed Hall. He smiled at Quest. "You thereby reach the conclusion that the engraver of the gold found the stone, already shaped by someone else, and adapted it to serve as the mounting, by cutting out the pocket for the gold."

"Yes."

"You would have made a splendid detective, Mr. Quest."

"Thank you."

"However, I cannot see how these conclusions will make it possible to find out where the rock came from."

Quest smiled. "Perhaps I can satisfy you on that score. Since my last visit here, I have visited a number of natural science museums and other sources of supply to collect photographs. I have been able to secure extremely sharp pictures of almost every one of the Inca ruins. In my home I made enlargements of small portions of these pictures. These enlargements show the marks of the primitive tools that cut the stones used in the buildings, and the characteristics of the craftsmen who used the tools."

"So that's it!" said Hall admiringly. "You hope to

match the tool marks on this stone to those on one of the old ruins."

"Yes. And when I find the ruins that match, I'll know exactly where they are located."

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "Imagine a whole building, maybe a temple, made out of uranium ore!"

"The chances are," said Gulliver, "there's a lot more o' that same kind o' rock where them stones came from."

"The Spanish invaders may have taken most of the Inca gold," said Quest. "But they were not looking for uranium." He took the gold medallion which Hall still held, and replaced it in the stone. "If you've no objection," he said to Bosworth, "I'd like to take this relic to my room and work on it there."

"I thought you would," replied Bosworth. "That's why I had the worktable installed. When are you going to start work?"

"Tonight."

"Yo', Hall," said Gulliver. "Yo' packin' a shootin' iron?"

Hall looked surprised. "Do you mean, am I carrying a gun?"

"That's what I asked yo'."

Hall smiled. "No. I'm not armed."

"That bein' the case, if yo' see any sign o' suspicious-lookin' strangers coyotin' around here, just let out a yell for me."

"Have you a gun?"

"I," replied Gulliver soberly, "came geared for trouble."

CHAPTER 10

The Silver Hypo

JOHN BOSWORTH put the Geiger counter back into his desk, then joined the others, who still stood in a group near the pedestal. C. Hollis Hall was congratulating Hamilton Quest on his ingenious approach to the problem, and Daniel Weaver was tipping the stone forward.

"I didn't get a good look at the scratches on the reverse side of the gold piece," he explained. "Mind if I take another look?"

"Of course not," replied Bosworth.

"Do you want my knife to pry it out?" asked Quest.

"I thought it would just drop out if I upended the stone," replied Weaver. He shook the relic until the medallion dropped from the hollowed out section, but failed to catch it. "Ooop!" he said as the gold disk dropped to the floor. He and Bosworth stooped at the same time to pick it up.

"I have it," Bosworth said.

"Hold it a minute, John." The lawyer took heavy, rimmed glasses from the breast pocket of his coat and put them on. "Now I can see those scratches better."

He eyed the medallion closely, holding it at various angles in relation to the light, then shook his head dubiously. "I don't see," he muttered, "how anyone can make head or tail out of that."

"It is nothing compared to the problem of deciphering the Babylonian Cuneiform," replied Tom's father. "Or some of the early writing in Sanskrit."

"Or," put in Whiz Walton laughingly, "some of the contracts I've seen lawyers draw up."

Bentley appeared at the library door and announced that he had coffee ready in the living room.

"That's for me," said Whiz.

The others agreed and moved into the adjoining room.

"I'm goin' to the bedroom," said Gulliver. "I'll be back in a minute." He disappeared through the door opening into the wing.

"What about the stone?" Bosworth asked Hamilton Quest. "You're going to work on it in your room?"

"Yes."

"Do you want me to take it back there, Dad?" asked Tom.

"Please do, Tom, after you finish your coffee."

"I don't care for coffee. I'll move it right now."

As Tom returned to the library, he noticed something shining beneath the long curtain that covered one of the French doors near the pedestal.

It proved to be one corner of a silver case the size of a small cigarette case. It apparently had been dropped by someone, then inadvertently kicked so it had slid beneath the heavy drape.

Picking it up, Tom looked for the initials of the owner but found none. He opened it and stared at the contents. The case was a small kit holding a hypodermic syringe, an extra needle, and two small bottles that held a colorless liquid. One of the vials was full, the other half full.

Leaving the stone on the pedestal, Tom returned to the living room and held up the silver case. "Did someone lose this?"

No one spoke until Whiz Walton said, "What is it? Cigarettes?"

"No," said Tom.

"Then what is inside?"

Instead of answering the columnist's question, Tom said, "Doesn't it belong to any one of you?"

"Not mine," said Weaver.

"I'm sure I never saw it before," said C. Hollis Hall.

"May I see it?" asked Bosworth.

Tom handed it over.

"What's this?" demanded the millionaire when he opened the case and saw the contents. "A hypo kit!"

Gulliver returned to the room with a bulge beneath his coat. "I got my shootin' iron in a shoulder holster," he explained. "Now, if thieves come lookin' for trouble, I'll accommodate 'em." He saw the strained expressions on the men's faces. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Did somethin' come ungummed?"

Bosworth held out the open kit. "Does this belong to you, Gulliver?" he asked.

"Me? No!" the big man replied. "That looks like a hypo outfit. Who's it belong to?"

"That," said Whiz Walton, "is the big question."

"Where'd it come from?"

"I found it," Tom said, "in the library. It was almost out of sight beneath one of the drapes."

Hamilton Quest reached into the case Bosworth still held open, and took out the half empty bottle. "It might be one of any number of things." He shook the vial to study the consistency of the liquid, then removed the stopper and held it to his nose.

"One of the men on our staff uses a hypo to take

some stuff for migraine headaches," observed Whiz Walton.

Quest dampened the end of his little finger with the liquid and touched it to his tongue.

"Any idea what it is?" asked Hall.

"I think," replied Tom's father, "it might be insulin."

"That's the stuff they give for diabetes," said Whiz Walton.

"Yes. The disease cannot be cured, but it can be kept under control by the use of insulin. People afflicted with it must always have a supply of insulin on hand. To be without it when it is needed might be fatal."

"Golly," Tom said, "if that *is* insulin, we'd better find the owner of that kit."

"Quest, can you tell for sure whether it is insulin?" asked Bosworth.

"I believe I have the necessary things to make a few simple tests."

Bosworth frowned at the others. "See here," he said, "if this belongs to one of you, there's no reason why you shouldn't claim it. Being a victim of diabetes is nothing to be ashamed of! My own grandfather died of the disease, before the discovery of insulin."

No one spoke.

"Maybe," suggested Tom, "it was dropped by one of the servants who cleaned the library, or by one of your other guests."

"Miss Nugent or Forbes Blaine? I'm sure neither of them has been in the library."

Bentley, who had been puttering with the coffee service on a near-by table, cleared his throat significantly.

"Do you want to say something, Bentley?" asked Bosworth.

"If I may, sir."

"Well?"

"I knew you would be using the library this evening, sir, and I wanted to be sure it was in good order. While you were eating, I went there to inspect it."

Bosworth closed the silver case with a snap and held it up. "Did you drop this?"

"Oh, no, sir. I simply wanted to tell you that it was not in the library before you all went in there after dinner."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tom Quest said it was almost out of sight beneath one of the drapes. You might have missed seeing it."

"I pulled back each of the drapes, Mr. Bosworth, to make certain the doors were locked. If that case had been on the floor, I know I would have seen it."

"This," said the millionaire, "is becoming very interesting!" There was an angry frown on his face as he looked from one to another of the men. "It seems certain that one of us dropped this case! If it held co-

caine, or some other drug of that nature, it would be understandable why the owner would not care to claim it. On the other hand, if it holds an essential medicine, there is no reason to disclaim ownership." Bosworth turned suddenly to Weaver.

"Dan," he said, "you're overweight and I know you take pills by the pocketful! Are you a diabetic?"

"Not I," replied the attorney. "If I were, you can bet your bottom dollar, I wouldn't be without my insulin!"

"How about you, Hall?"

The man from the Atomic Energy Commission said, "I take iron tablets to build up my blood, vitamins and a few other things in the hope of gaining weight, but I have never needed insulin. Nor anything else that is administered by hypodermic injection. If you wish to confirm that, I suggest you telephone my office in Washington. My complete record is on file, and it includes all of my ailments."

Hall smiled and added, "You'd be surprised if you knew what an exhaustive record is maintained on the men who work in my department."

"You, Walton!" said Bosworth. "You're a nervous, high-strung type. Maybe you need a shot in the arm once in a while."

"Nuts," replied the columnist.

Bosworth glanced at Gulliver. "You couldn't possibly need anything in the way of medicine." He turned to Quest. "How about you, Hamilton?"

Tom's father shook his head. "I'll keep this half-filled bottle of the liquid," he said, "and run some tests to confirm my guess that it is insulin."

"Please let me know." Bosworth put the case into his pocket. "I'll keep this until someone claims it," he said. "Now does anyone want coffee?"

Before anyone could reply, there was a soft click as the library door swung closed.

"Must be a draft in the house," muttered Bosworth.

"Tom, you were going to move the Inca stone to my room," his father reminded him.

"I'll do it right away, Dad." Tom opened the library door and again went inside.

As he reached for the stone, he heard the door again click closed and noticed a slight movement of a drape on one of the front windows.

Hurrying forward, he drew aside the drape.

One of the double doors was open a couple of inches. In the darkness outside, no one could be seen. Bentley had said all of the doors in the library were locked!

Tom examined the locks, which were of a familiar type. One door of the pair was held closed by rods that slid into sockets set in the floor and in the wooden top of the door frame. The other door latched into this first one, and there was a simple bolt, operated by an ordinary door key that locked the two doors together. Tom saw the door key in the lock—on the *outside.*

Carrying his investigation further, he found a few small blades of grass on the carpet between the door

and the pedestal. Someone had entered the library from the outside during the time that he had been in the living room.

He called to Bosworth, who entered with the other men.

Tom showed the open door, the key in the lock, and the wisp of grass.

"Snoopers!" exclaimed Gulliver. His big hand reached beneath his coat and came out with the biggest six-shooter Colt had ever made.

"Put that thing away," snapped Bosworth.

"Gulliver," frowned Weaver, the attorney, "have you a permit to carry that weapon?"

"What I got in the way o' permits ain't none o' yo' business!"

"In this state you cannot carry a gun without a permit!"

"Is that so?" replied the big man, scowling. "Then maybe yo' hanker to try takin' this betsy away from me?"

"Bury it, Gulliver," said Whiz Walton.

Grudgingly, Gulliver holstered his weapon.

"It would be easy for anyone to open these doors," Bosworth explained. "One key fits all of them. In fact, there's been only one key in this room for a long time." He pushed back the drapes, glanced at another pair of doors, then crossed the room and examined the doors on that side. "Here," he said. "The key's in this door."

Dan Weaver pointed to the key still in the outside of

the door Tom had found open. "Where did that one come from?"

"Probably from another part of the house." Bosworth stepped to his desk, took a flashlight from a drawer, then moved to the doors and opened them wide. The circle of light fell on the grass outside the door.

"Lemme have a look," said Gulliver. "I'm good at findin' footprints."

"Go ahead," said Bosworth.

Gulliver took the flashlight, stepped outside, and dropped to his hands and knees. He held the light close to the ground.

"I c'n see where there's grass broken down. Sure enough, someone was here, an' mighty recent."

"How do you know that?"

"Because some o' the blades o' grass are still springin' back to straight up."

"Can you identify the footprint?"

"The ground's too hard to show any outline," replied the big Texan. "But I'd say offhand that it was a man who came here."

"Why do you say that?"

"Women wear high-heel shoes, an' they'd o' made dents in the ground."

"Clara Nugent doesn't wear high heels," replied Bosworth.

"Might be a good idea to ask her if she came here," suggested Weaver.

"I intend to."

"One thing is sure," said Gulliver, returning to the room. "There was *someone* here!"

"Whoever it was might have dropped the hypo case," Weaver said.

"I doubt that," Bosworth replied. "We all heard the door between this room and the living room close. At the time I said there must be a draft in the house. I think that door blew closed when this French door was opened from the outside. And that was after Tom found the silver case."

Weaver nodded and said, "That's so."

Hamilton Quest spoke. "If no one objects, I'd like to retire."

"You do anything you want, Hamilton," said Bosworth. "You're the Big Wheel around here. It's up to you to trace the rock. Anything the rest of us can do to help you—just call on us!"

"Thank you, John."

"Well," said Tom with a slight laugh, "I'll try again to take the Inca stone to Dad's room."

"Fates," muttered Whiz, "seem to be conspiring against it."

Tom picked up the stone with the gold charm and carried it through the living room, down the long corridor of the wing, and into his father's room, where he placed it on the worktable.

"Thank you, Tom," said his father, who had followed.

Tom sat down on a chair near the table. "What do you make of it, Dad?"

"Of what, Tom?" Quest took the small bottle from his pocket and placed it on the worktable.

"Of that open door and the hypodermic kit."

"I don't know, son. It is impossible to make any deductions until we know what is in this vial."

"You thought it was insulin."

"I still think so. But I must be sure."

"Is there any reason anyone would carry insulin, unless he needed it for diabetes?"

"No." The scientist poured a few drops of the colorless liquid into a test tube, then clamped the test tube in a stand. He lighted an alcohol lamp and placed it beneath the test tube.

"What do you make of the fact that someone entered the library?"

"One thing at a time, Tom. At the moment, I am trying to test this liquid."

Tom said no more, but he remained in the room and watched his father work. At the end of half an hour, Hamilton Quest said, "Well, that's it."

"Insulin?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't the owner claim it?"

"That is what I'd like to know."

CHAPTER 11

Three Problems

"Who's there?" called Tom in response to a soft rap on the door of his father's room.

"Me!"

"Come on in, Whiz."

Gulliver followed the columnist into the room and closed the door.

"Dad just finished his tests and he found that stuff is insulin."

"Yeah?"

"Then why in tarnation didn't someone lay claim to it?" asked Gulliver. "If the critter needs the stuff, he'll be in bad shape if he don't git it back."

"Maybe he did," said Whiz.

"Maybe who did what?"

"Maybe the owner did get it back."

"Yo' know blame well no one admitted ownin' it."

"I didn't say anyone admitted owning it. I said maybe the owner got it back. Bosworth put it into his pocket, didn't he?"

"Yo' think he's the one who dropped it?"

"Could be."

"I doubt that very much," said Hamilton Quest. "I've known John Bosworth for a long time. I'm sure that I'd know if he were suffering from an incurable disease."

"Mr. Quest," said Whiz Walton, "John Bosworth used to be a big-name athlete. He's taken good care of himself since he retired from athletics. He's mighty proud of his good condition. He'd hate like blazes to have anyone know he was sick.

"Believe me, Mr. Quest, I know his type. If he were bald, no one would ever know it because he'd spend a fortune on wigs. If he were short, he'd wear built-up shoes, and if he were hard of hearing, he'd try to hide the fact by learning to lip-read. By the same token, if

he happened to be a victim of diabetes, he'd try to hide the fact!"

"Maybe Whiz is right, Dad! Maybe *that's* what has been ailing Mr. Bosworth."

"Um-m," murmured Quest. "Whiz makes a strong argument."

The sharp newspaperman said, "Tom, what's that about something ailing Bosworth?"

"Oh—uh—golly, I let the cat out of the bag!"

"Have you been holding out on me?"

Tom's father spoke. "Mrs. Bosworth talked to Tom and me while you were looking over the grounds. She noticed that her husband has been nervous and worried since the last time Tom and I came here."

"Doesn't she know about the Inca stone?"

"No. Bosworth didn't tell her. And inasmuch as he hadn't told her about it, I didn't feel at liberty to do so."

"Why didn't Bosworth tell her?"

"Probably because such a strong point was made of the importance of secrecy."

"Isn't it possible, Dad," said Tom, "that it's his health and not the Inca relic that has made Mr. Bosworth nervous?"

"It is possible, Tom."

"He talked to the writer," Whiz said.

"To whom, Whiz?"

"Clara Nugent. After you and Tom came here, Bos-

worth and Weaver went to the sunporch where the old gal was reading her play to Blaine."

"Did you two go with Bosworth and Weaver?" Tom asked.

"No. We stayed in the living room and talked to Hall."

"He ain't a bad sort," said Gulliver. "He's the kind o' gent that improves as yo' git to know him better. He's done some target shootin' on a range in Washington, so we got to talkin' about guns. He said he'd sure like to visit my ranch an' go jack-rabbit huntin' in my jeep."

"Are you," asked Whiz, "through yakking about C. Hollis Hall?"

"Yo' got somethin' yo' want to say?"

"Yes! I started to tell Tom and his father about Clara and Blaine."

"Then go ahead an' finish tellin' about them two."

"Bosworth and Weaver told them someone had entered the library and asked them point blank if they knew anything about it."

"What did they say?" asked Tom.

"They said they'd gone to the sunporch right after dinner and hadn't left it."

"They could o' been lyin'," said Gulliver.

"In that case, they'd both have to lie," Whiz said.

"Then it must've been Mrs. Bosworth who unlocked that door."

"Not necessarily." Whiz shook his head.

"Who else would o' done it?"

"Maybe the gardener, or his wife, or Charlie, the chauffeur, or Mrs. Bentley, or the maid—or anyone else who's on the island."

"There ain't no one else here."

"How do you know, Gulliver?" Whiz demanded.

"Well, I—"

"This island's about six miles upstream from Alexandria Bay, but it's only about a quarter of a mile directly across the water to the mainland. Anyone could come over in a rowboat or a canoe—or, for that matter, someone could swim the distance."

"That's so," agreed the big man.

"Remember our walk to the other end of the island this afternoon? There's a small woods there. Plenty of trees to hide anyone who makes a landing there."

Hamilton Quest said, "Whiz, the problems seem to crystallize in this way. Number one, who dropped the insulin, and why doesn't he claim it? Number two, who entered the library and why?"

"That's about it," replied the columnist.

"Problem number three, where did the Inca rock come from? Now that's the problem I must solve. So I would appreciate it, gentlemen, if you'd all remove yourselves from this room and let me get started."

CHAPTER 12

The Brown Button

BEFORE Tom, Whiz Walton, and Gulliver could leave the room, Bentley appeared in the doorway with a telephone in his hand.

"There is a long distance call for you, Mr. Quest," he said. "I'll plug in the phone." He placed the instrument

on the bedside table and fitted the four-pronged plug into a socket near the floor.

"That's slick," muttered Gulliver.

"There's a phone plug in every room," explained Tom.

The butler said, "Mr. Bosworth instructed me to leave the phone here for your convenience, Mr. Quest."

"Thank you, Bentley."

"Shall I prepare your bed now, sir?"

"Leave it. I'll turn it down when I'm ready to retire."

"If you wish, I'll return later."

"Thank you, no. I'll be working late."

The butler nodded and left the room.

Quest picked up the telephone and said, "Hamilton Quest speaking." After a slight pause, he said, "I'll hold on." He covered the mouthpiece to say, "Someone's calling from Washington."

"We'll clear out," said Tom.

"Wait, son, until I find out who is calling."

Gulliver said, "If they got places in all the rooms where yo' can plug in a phone, why don't they have phones enough to go around?"

"They wouldn't work," explained Tom. "Only a certain number of phones can be hooked up at one time."

"Hello," said Hamilton Quest suddenly. Then, "Oh, hello, Frank!" After a pause, he said, "Yes, he is here. He arrived soon after we did." Another pause. "Yes, he showed us his credentials. Everything is fine."

"Mr. Quest!" cut in Whiz Walton suddenly.

"Just a minute, Frank." The scientist looked at Whiz questioningly.

"Is he asking about C. Hollis Hall?"

"Yes. Just a routine check to see if he arrived."

"Can you find out if Hall's a diabetic, or if for any other reason he'd use insulin?"

Quest smiled and spoke into the telephone. "Frank, this may sound odd to you. Are you well acquainted with Hall?" Pause. "You are, eh. Then perhaps you can tell me if he would have any reason to carry insulin."

"The answer," said Quest, a moment later, after cradling the phone, "is definitely 'No.' "

"Thanks, Mr. Quest. I—I probably stepped out of line busting in like that, but—"

"That's all right, Whiz."

"We'd better get out and let Dad work," suggested Tom. "Let's go to my room. We can talk there as long as we want."

Whiz and Gulliver agreed.

"By the way, Tom," said the columnist. "You said there's a phone outlet in every room."

"That's right."

"Mr. Quest, are you going to be using that phone tonight?"

The scientist shook his head.

"Mind if I borrow it? I'd like to make a call."

"Help yourself, Whiz."

"I'll get it." Tom pulled out the plug and coiled the length of wire between the plug and the phone.

In the corridor, with Whiz and Gulliver, Tom noticed that the door to his room was open. "I guess Bentley's turning down my bed," he said.

"Is it a custom in this place to turn down the beds?" asked Whiz.

"What kind o' fancy deal is that?" Gulliver said, with a snort.

"He makes the rounds every night," explained Tom. "He folds up the bedspread, turns back the blanket and top sheet, and fluffs the pillows, so all you've got to do is slide in."

"Plaza Hotel has nothing on this place," muttered Whiz.

Bentley came out of the room, smiled at Tom, then entered the room on the opposite side of the hall, the room occupied by the observer from the Atomic Energy Commission.

Whiz and Gulliver followed Tom into the bedroom. The bed had been neatly prepared, just as Tom had said.

"Want to make your phone call from here, Whiz?"

"Might as well."

While Tom connected the instrument, Gulliver said, "I'm goin' to do a little more lookin' around outside."

"Where?" asked Whiz.

"Outside the house. I got a good bright flashlight in my gear. I'll git it an' see if I can find out any more about the critter who sneaked into that library. I'll be back in a little while."

The big man hurried out of the room to see if he could find something.

Whiz Walton chuckled as he consulted a pocket address book for a telephone number. "My boss is going to flip his lid when I call him at home."

"Why are you going to call him?" asked Tom.

"You'll know when you hear my end of the conversation." The columnist gave the long distance operator a New York telephone number, then added, "Person-to-person. I want to talk to J. V. Langdon, collect." He gave his name and the number from which he was calling, then bent his head to grip the phone between his ear and shoulder while he lighted a cigarette. He grinned and winked at Tom as he said, "The girl's got Langdon—asking him if he'll accept the call."

Tom could hear the sharp voice of the managing editor. "What're you doing in Alexandria Bay? I thought you were on your way to Egypt!"

"A slight mistake, Boss. I'm calling from the Bosworth home."

"John Bosworth?"

"Yes."

"The railroad magnate?"

"The same."

"What in blazes are you doing there? How'd *you* get into *his* home?"

"Boss," said Whiz, "I'll answer all your questions when I see you. Right now I need some help."

Langdon noticed the soberness in the newshound's

voice and dropped his bantering manner. "Talk," he said.

"I can't explain anything right now—"

"I'm not asking you to."

"Pencil handy?"

"Of course."

"Write down three names. John Bosworth, you know who he is."

"Of course."

"His attorney, Daniel Weaver. His office is in New York."

"I know of him. What's the third name?"

"Forbes Blaine."

"What about *him*?"

"He and Weaver are both here."

"Weaver I can understand. But how did a character like Blaine get into Bosworth's summer place? Never mind. What about the three men?"

"Is there any way you can find out if one of them is using insulin?"

"Insulin! The stuff they give to diabetics?"

"Right."

Langdon's voice rasped, "Walton, have you been drinking?"

"No."

"Is this a rib?"

"I'm dead serious. I don't know how you're going to go about getting the information. But all three of the men are probably patients of New York's most promi-

nent doctors, and go to hospitals regularly for a complete checkup. Now if you—"

Langdon interrupted, "Are you telling *me* how to run down information?"

"Forgive me," grinned the columnist.

"I'll put a couple of legmen to work in the morning. Shall I call you there?"

"Yes. But if I give you double talk, you'll know someone's on this line. In that case, I'll call you back."

"You'll hear from me, Walton. And by the way—"

"Yes?"

"Inasmuch as you did not go to Egypt, I'll expect a substantial part of that expense money to be returned."

"Fair enough, Boss. Bye, now."

Whiz hung up and turned to Tom. "The fact that someone lied about that insulin gets under my skin."

"What'll you do if you find that one of those men is a diabetic, Whiz?"

"I don't know. I'm probably wasting time even thinking about it, but I'm like most other newshounds. We resent it when someone tries to fool us or hide the truth."

Whiz ground out his cigarette in the ashtray on the dresser. "An ethical reporter can keep a confidence better than most people," he continued. "If someone levels with us, and asks us to respect his confidence, we'll do it. I know reporters who've gone to jail because they refused to betray a confidence. And if someone

lies to us, we'll knock ourselves out trying to learn the truth. When we do learn the truth, we're under no obligation to keep it secret."

"You mentioned Forbes Blaine."

"Yes."

"He couldn't have dropped that silver case. He wasn't in the library."

"I know, but I figured it was better to check on everyone."

"I think either Mr. Bosworth or Weaver dropped the case," Tom said. "Do you remember when Weaver wanted to look at the gold charm? He tipped it out of the rock and it fell to the floor."

"That's right. Both Weaver and Bosworth bent down to pick it up. Probably that's when the case fell out of one of their pockets."

At that moment, Gulliver's heavy voice came through the door. "Yo', Blaine," he said. "Wait a minute. I want to see somethin'."

Tom opened the door.

Blaine, standing in the thickly carpeted hall, looked confused and unhappy as his right arm was gripped in Gulliver's big hand.

"Please let go of my arm, Mr. Gulliver," he said. "What do you want to see?"

"Yo' buttons."

"What's up, Gulliver?" asked Tom.

"I just wanted to see Mr. Blaine's buttons, that's all!"

Blaine's face was flushed and his eyes held a look of desperation as he said to Tom, "I was just about to enter my room when your big friend came into the corridor. He rushed up and gripped my arm—"

Gulliver released his grip on Blaine's right arm, then seized the left. He eyed the four small buttons on the sleeve of the brown sport jacket. "That's all," he muttered, dropping Blaine's arm. "That was nothin' to git all het up about."

"But why in the world did you want to see the buttons on my jacket?" Forbes Blaine demanded.

Gulliver reached into his pocket and brought out a small brown button. "On account o' this," he said.

Blaine looked at the button. "What about it?"

"I remembered that yo' was wearin' a brown coat an' I thought yo' might o' lost it."

"And what if I had?"

"In that case, I'd want to know how it got where I found it!"

"Where did you find it, Mr. Gulliver?"

"On the grass just a few feet from the library."

Blaine was obviously annoyed. "Mr. Bosworth mentioned the fact that someone entered the library. He is completely satisfied that neither Miss Nugent nor I know anything about that intrusion. Neither of us was out of sight of the other during the entire time of your —uh—conference."

Gulliver nodded silently.

"Now, if you have no objection," continued Blaine, "I'd like to retire."

"I reckon it'll be all right," said Gulliver.

Blaine turned on his heel and entered his room.

"You've offended him, Gulliver," said Tom.

Gulliver grinned. "Too bad."

Whiz said, "Let's see the button."

The big man handed it over.

"Good quality button," observed the columnist. "It's not the kind they use on low-priced clothing."

"It's brown," said Gulliver, "an' from a man's suit. I thought for sure it was Blaine who lost it."

"Even if it had been his," Tom said, "it wouldn't have proved that he's the one who entered the library. He might have dropped it while walking around during the afternoon."

Gulliver shook his head. "No, Tom, I know that ain't the case. The button was dropped after the sneakin' coyote had walked toward the door o' the library."

"How do you know?" asked Whiz.

"Because the button was lying on top o' one o' the footprints. If it'd been dropped earlier, it would o' been pressed into the ground when it was stepped on."

"Button, button, who's lost the button?" murmured the irrepressible columnist. "I'm going to bed."

CHAPTER 13

Heard in the Bathhouse

HAMILTON QUEST worked far into the night to bring out the latent scratches on the back of the gold medallion. First he carefully cleansed the surface. Then he made three photographs of it, one by a white light set at an acute angle to accentuate the shadows in the

scratches, one by ultraviolet light and the third with special film and a lamp that delivered no visible light, but instead gave out infra-red rays that have a peculiarly penetrating quality.

He developed, fixed, and dried the films after a minimum of washing, then made prints.

With the first photograph, the one made by white light, propped in front of him, he quickly copied to a sheet of paper the characters that were legible and the legible portions of incomplete characters. The ultraviolet and infra-red pictures provided further details.

When the scientist had copied to his worksheet all that appeared on the photographs, he used a high-power magnifier to make a direct study of the gold. By the use of stains and chemicals he was able, bit by bit, to fill in the lines of Inca writing.

Finally, when he had gone as far as he could, a few blanks remained but he was satisfied that he had restored enough of the message to make a translation possible.

Absorbed in his work, he didn't notice the passage of time and was surprised when he glanced at his watch to see that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning. He relaxed for a short time in a hot tub, then went to bed and to sleep.

At six o'clock Tom Quest opened his eyes and saw sunlight slanting through the window. He jumped out of bed and looked out. It was a glorious Saturday morn-

ing with a cloudless sky giving promise of a fine day. He remembered the boat dock, the bathhouse, and the diving platform and decided to take a dip. Shucking off his pajamas, he pulled on a T shirt and a pair of slacks, then barefooted through the adjoining bathroom to the door of his friends' room. He saw that Whiz and Gulliver were sleeping soundly and decided not to waken them. He slung a big, rough towel over his shoulder, returned to his room, slipped his feet into a pair of moccasins and left the house quietly so as not to disturb anyone.

The early morning air was invigorating. Tom felt keenly alive as he ran down the gently sloping, dewy lawn to the dock. In the bathhouse he saw a generous assortment of swimming trunks and had no trouble finding a pair his size. A moment later he dived into the river and swam fifty yards at racing speed, then rolled over and floated on his back. He made a few dives from the surface, trying without success to reach bottom, then sidestroked back to the dock.

In the bathhouse, he rubbed himself down briskly with the coarse towel until his smooth, tanned skin was glowing. He was pulling on his slacks when he heard footsteps on the dock and the unmistakable voice of Daniel Weaver.

"No, Charlie," the attorney was saying, "due to legal restrictions, you can't buy anything like that without going through a lot of red tape. You'd better take my car and drive to New York. Go to my office and hand

the note I gave you to my associate. He'll take care of things."

Feeling like an eavesdropper, Tom peered through a crack in the door and saw that it was the chauffeur to whom Weaver was speaking. They stood only a few yards away on the dock, which, wet with dew, did not show the footprints of Tom coming out of the water.

"Mr. Bosworth may not like me being gone all day, Mr. Weaver."

"I'll fix it up with him. Unless you go to New York for me, I'll have to go myself and Mr. Bosworth wants me to stay here."

"Do you really need—"

"I," interrupted the attorney, "would hardly send you to New York on an unnecessary errand! This may be a matter of life and death, Charlie, so please return as quickly as possible."

"We might save time if you phoned your office. Your partner could start driving from New York and meet me halfway."

"There are too many extension phones in the house. Someone might hear me and I want this kept secret."

Tom was fully dressed and ready to leave the bathhouse. But he realized that Weaver would be greatly displeased to learn that his conversation with Charlie had been overheard. By remaining unseen, Tom decided, he could avoid an awkward situation.

"Whatever you say, Mr. Weaver."

"Don't mention this errand to anyone, Charlie. Understand?"

"I understand, sir."

Through the crack, Tom saw Weaver hand over money and heard him say, "This will cover your expenses and leave something for yourself."

"Thanks, Mr. Weaver."

The overweight attorney left the dock and walked toward the house as Charlie started the speedboat's engine, cast off the line, and swung out into the river.

Wondering what the two men had been talking about, Tom waited until he was sure Weaver had reached the house before leaving the bathhouse.

Tom found Whiz Walton and Gulliver dressing in their bedroom and told them about the conversation he had overheard. "I felt like a heel, standing there in the bathhouse listening to the conversation, but that seemed better than walking out and letting Weaver see me. He'd know I'd heard him talking and—well—"

"I know how you felt," said Whiz.

"I'd say yo' did the right thing, Tom," added Gulliver. "I'm wonderin' what Weaver an' Charlie were talkin' about."

"So am I," said Tom.

The columnist looked thoughtful. "What was it Weaver said about legal restrictions?"

"I don't remember exactly," Tom said. "He told Charlie he couldn't buy whatever they were talking

about without going through a lot of red tape. Then, a minute later, he said it might be a matter of life and death."

"So he sent Charlie to his law office in New York with a note to his partner."

"Yes."

"I'd like to know what Charlie went after."

"Whiz," said Tom, "are there any legal restrictions on the sale of insulin?"

"I don't know."

"I was thinkin' o' that, too," put in Gulliver.

"I can't think of anything else," said Tom, "that Weaver would send a man all the way to New York to get."

"But Tom," said Gulliver, "he could git any medicine he needed right in Alexandria Bay. An' if it was somethin' that needed a doctor's prescription, he could git that without any trouble."

"He could, Gulliver, but maybe he couldn't get it secretly."

"That," said Whiz, "brings us back to the original question. What's the reason for keeping secret the need for insulin?"

"I don't know," Tom said. "But I do know I'm hungry. Let's get breakfast."

CHAPTER 14

Dead Ends

DANIEL WEAVER was sitting alone at the table when Tom Quest, Whiz, and Gulliver entered the sunporch where breakfast was served.

After a pleasant greeting, the lawyer said, "We are the early birds. No one else has yet appeared for breakfast."

Bentley brought in warm plates and a platter of scrambled eggs flanked by crisp bacon and thick slices of fried ham.

"I certainly envy you fellows," Weaver said. "I am on a strict diet. My breakfast consists of one thin slice of unbuttered toast and coffee without sugar or cream."

"Doctor's orders?" asked Whiz Walton, loading his plate.

"Yes. He said I must lose a lot of weight."

John Bosworth entered the sunporch and sat down at the table. "What a day!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "What's the program for today?" he asked Tom.

"I'm planning to work with Dad. I don't know what Whiz and Gulliver have in mind."

"I aim to stay close to the house in case there's anything I can do for Quest," Gulliver said.

"Weaver and I," said Bosworth, "will be working in the library most of the day. We have some contracts to go over." He turned to Whiz. "Is there anything you'd particularly like to do?"

"As a matter of fact, there is," replied the columnist. "I'd like to take a ride in that speedboat. If the fellow who brought us over from the mainland could take me out—"

"Charlie?" cut in Bosworth. "Of course. I—"

Weaver broke in, "He'll not be around today."

Bosworth looked surprised.

"I called him early this morning, Bosworth, and sent him on an errand. He's driving my car to New York."

"Oh," said Bosworth.

"I needed something from my office and it was a case of send him or go myself. I knew you wanted to go over those contracts with me, so I thought it better to send Charlie. Hope you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind, Dan. I'm sorry, Walton, that Charlie's not here."

"Oh, that's all right," said Whiz. "I'll find plenty to keep me busy."

Whiz didn't care a thing about a speedboat ride. He had mentioned it only to compel Weaver to tell Bosworth about sending the chauffeur to New York and had hoped the attorney would state the nature of the errand. In this, Whiz was disappointed.

Tom and the others finished eating and were lingering at the table with their coffee when Hamilton Quest appeared and said, "Good morning!" in a cheery voice.

"Dad," said Tom, "what are you doing up so early? Didn't you work as late as you planned?"

"I worked until four," replied the scientist as he sat down and unfolded his napkin.

"Then you couldn't have had more than three or four hours of sleep!" exclaimed Weaver.

"That is ample for me. I sleep very little when I'm working on an interesting assignment."

"Top of the morning!" called C. Hollis Hall as he entered the dining room at a fast pace. "Where are the ladies?"

"Probably still asleep," replied Bosworth.

Bentley poured coffee for the last three arrivals and said, "Cook is preparing more bacon and eggs. I'll bring them in directly."

"Did you work last night, Mr. Quest?" asked C. Hollis Hall.

"Oh, yes."

"He worked until four o'clock this morning," said Bosworth. "And look at him! He's more wide awake than any of us."

"Remarkable," smiled Hall. To Quest, he said, "Did you make some progress?"

"Very satisfactory progress."

"Splendid!" enthused the observer from the Atomic Energy Commission. "How far did you get?"

"I filled in most of the missing letters and figures on the back of the medallion."

Tom said, "Golly, Dad. You sure did make headway! You must be just about ready to start translating."

"I plan to start work on the translation this morning."

"I," said Hall, "am eager to see that translation. How soon do you think you'll have it completed?"

Quest said, "I don't know." He paused, then went on. "Mr. Hall, I think we'd better have an understanding."

"An understanding, Mr. Quest?"

"Yes. Last evening in the library, you saw that the Inca stone was radioactive, and I gave you a detailed account of the methods by which I hope to learn where

the stone came from. I have just advised you that the first phase of my work is completed. I shall advise you further when I have completed the translation. But that is all you are going to know."

Hall's thin face reddened. "I understood that I was to be kept fully advised of your progress."

"When my work is finished and the report is ready, I shall telephone the man who authorized me to do this work. If he tells me to turn my findings over to you, I'll be happy to do so."

"Very well, Mr. Quest." Hall smiled disarmingly. "Any way you want to handle it is all right with me."

Quest returned the smile. "Thank you, Mr. Hall."

Tom and his father worked steadily all day with only a brief pause at noon to eat a light lunch that Bentley brought to the bedroom on a tray.

The interpretation of the characters on the back of the gold medallion proved to be a difficult undertaking. Many of the curious figures were a form of Indian picture writing. To determine their significance, each figure had to be taken separately and compared to the thousands of illustrations in the thick reference books Quest had brought with him until a similar drawing was found. To make the task more difficult, the pictures scratched into the gold were poorly drawn.

By mid-afternoon, enough had been accomplished to indicate the nature of the message. It seemed to be a biography of the early craftsman who had carved the Inca charm. After that the work went faster. At five

o'clock, Quest rose from his chair and stretched. "It's time to break," he said. "Take a swim, son, or do whatever you want. I'm going to take a short nap before dinner."

"I think we can finish this tonight, Dad."

"I'm sure we can. And I think, when we get the rest of that old gold-carver's biography, we'll have narrowed down the search for the place where he found the stone."

"Whiz and Gulliver are out there in the patio. I'll see what they have to say." Tom opened the French doors. "See you later, Dad."

As Tom joined his friends, who were sprawled in reclining chairs, Whiz Walton said, "How'd you make out?"

"Pretty good, Whiz. I think we'll finish the translation tonight."

"Good goin'," Gulliver muttered.

"You look glum, Gulliver. What's wrong?" Tom asked.

"Dead ends, Tom. If there's anything gits under my skin, it's a dead end, an' we got 'em here."

Tom laughed. "What do you mean?"

"That doggone brown button," grumbled the big man. "I can't find out who lost it."

"Gulliver spent most of the morning trying to find clues in front of the house," said Whiz Walton.

"An' got nowhere."

"Then he went to the gardener's cottage to see if the

gardener or Charlie, the chauffeur, had a suit with a missing brown button."

"Again I got nowhere," Gulliver grunted.

"This afternoon, he walked all the way around the island to see if there were any sign that someone had made a recent landing."

"I figured the snooper might o' come here by boat. But I drew another blank."

"Oh, well, Gulliver," said Tom, "maybe the identity of whoever came into the library isn't important."

"Whiz hit a dead end, too."

Tom looked at Whiz.

"Had a phone call from Langdon," explained the newshound. "He checked on Bosworth, Blaine, and Weaver."

"Oh?"

"He found the hospitals each of them go to for their regular check-ups, and someone, probably by paying a bribe, got a complete report. Bosworth is in perfect condition. Weaver has high blood pressure and is on a reducing diet. Blaine has a slight heart murmur, but otherwise he's O.K. None of them has any need for insulin."

"Another dead end," rumbled Gulliver. "If ever I—"

"Wait!" cut in Tom suddenly. "Listen!"

From the opposite side of the house came the roar of the speedboat's engine.

"That sounds like Bosworth's boat," said Tom.

"If it is, Charlie's back."

"Yo' wait here," cried Gulliver, leaping to his feet. "I'm goin' to meet him at the dock an' see what he went to New York to git for Weaver."

"I don't see as it makes much difference now," said Whiz as Gulliver ran to the open end of the patio and disappeared around a corner of the house. "Last night, after the insulin incident, and the opening of the library door by the person unknown, it seemed as though something were building up. But we probably were making mountains out of molehills."

"Just the same," mused Tom, "I'd like to know who dropped that insulin kit."

For a moment he listened to the approaching speedboat. When the engine was cut off, he said, "I guess that is Charlie. Let's go to the dock and see what Gulliver says to him."

"Suits me," replied the newshound.

CHAPTER 15

Weaver Becomes Confidential

THE MAN who stepped from the speedboat to the Bosworth dock was a total stranger. He was a pleasant-looking, medium-sized man with sandy hair, freckles, and a good smile.

"My name," he said, "is Riley."

"What're yo' doin' in that boat? Where's Charlie?"

Riley took a folded paper out of his pocket and handed it to Gulliver. "This will explain," he said.

"Let's see it," said Whiz Walton, taking the note from Gulliver's hand. "Addressed to Mr. Bosworth," he said.

"Then we shouldn't read it," said Tom.

"It's all right." Riley smiled. "Nothing confidential about it. Go ahead and read it."

Whiz said, "I'll read it aloud: 'Dear Mr. Bosworth. Due to personal matters I have to make a short trip. I'll be back in a couple of days. In the meantime, I've asked my friend, Bill Riley, to take my place. He's reliable and he'll take good care of the boats and cars. Yours truly, Charlie.' "

"Is he in trouble?" asked Gulliver.

"Nothing serious," replied Riley. "He gave me a run-down on his duties here and told me about the guests. I'll bet I can call all three of you by name. You're Mr. Gulliver; you're Mr. Walton, and you must be Tom Quest."

"You're right," said Tom.

"Did Charlie git to New York like he was supposed to?" asked Gulliver.

"Yes."

"Did he git somethin' for Mr. Weaver?"

Riley nodded.

"Yo' got it?"

Riley picked up a paper-wrapped package from the seat of the speedboat. It was roughly about six inches square and a couple of inches thick.

"Lemme have it," said Gulliver. "I'll take it to Weaver."

"Sorry, Mr. Gulliver, but Charlie told me to hand it to him personally."

Gulliver frowned darkly and was about to speak when Tom said, "Here comes Mr. Weaver."

The plump attorney was striding down the walk from the house. Reaching the dock, he questioned Riley just as the others had. Riley showed him the note.

"You'd better take this to Mr. Bosworth."

"That's what I planned to do, Mr. Weaver."

"You know my name?"

"Yes. Charlie described you."

"He called us all by name," said Gulliver. "An' he's got a package for yo'."

"Oh, good! Let's have it."

As Riley handed over the package, the attorney asked, "Do you know what's inside?"

Riley smiled. "Charlie didn't tell me," he said, "but I think I could make a pretty good guess."

Weaver tore off the wrapping. "It is a gun."

"That's what I would have guessed."

Gulliver said, "What the tarnation d'yo' want of a gun?"

"You carry one!"

"That's different. I'm sort of a bodyguard for Mr. Quest. What's more, I always tote a shootin' iron, no matter where I go."

Weaver looked at Riley and said, "You'd better report to Mr. Bosworth at once."

Riley nodded and walked toward the house, while Weaver, frowning, watched him for a moment. "I didn't want to speak in front of a stranger," he said, "but I know you three are to be trusted, so I'm going to tell you that I don't like the situation in Bosworth's house."

"What do you mean, Mr. Weaver?"

"Tom, we all know there are people who would give a lot to learn the results of your father's research."

"That's right, Mr. Weaver."

"The Communists could sure make use o' the information he's gittin'," said Gulliver.

"It would be valuable to anyone, Gulliver. And I think two people came to this island for the express purpose of getting the information. I don't know how far they would go to get it, but I'm not rejecting the possibility that they might go as far as murder!"

"That's a strong statement, Mr. Weaver," said Whiz. "Is there anything to support your suspicion?"

"Who d'yo' suspect?" asked Gulliver.

"Instead of answering your question, Gulliver, I'll tell you what I know. In the first place, Clara Nugent came here despite Margaret Bosworth's request that she come at another time. And she brought Forbes Blaine with her."

"Surely," said Whiz, "you don't suspect those two of planning a murder?"

"I'm telling you what I know, not what I suspect. I know that Forbes Blaine has a gun."

"He has?" Tom said.

"How do you know?" asked Whiz.

"Last night, when Bentley went into Blaine's room to turn down the bed, he saw the gun in the dresser drawer."

"Was the drawer open?" asked Tom.

"I didn't ask Bentley," Weaver said dryly.

"He has no business poking through a guest's things," declared Tom.

"I'll not argue that point, Tom. But the fact is, he saw Blaine's gun."

"That Bentley," rumbled Gulliver, "is a snoopin' coyote! If I catch him cat-footin' through my gear, I'll twist his neck!"

Weaver smiled. "He reported to Mr. Bosworth that Blaine had the gun. Bosworth told me."

"But the mere fact that he has a gun—" began Tom.

"Wait," said Weaver. "Let me tell you something else. Do you remember that the library door was unlocked last night while we were all in the living room?"

"Of course," replied Tom.

"I been tryin' to run down the critter who unlocked it," said Gulliver, reaching into his pocket. "I picked up this brown button that I think he dropped."

"This is the button you found?"

"Yep."

Whiz said, "He's been trying all day to find a brown coat with a button missing."

"A man's coat," added Gulliver.

"Why must it be a man's coat? Some women wear tailored suits with buttons like these. Clara Nugent, for example. Did you look at her—"

"Thunderation!" exploded Gulliver. "I never thought o' her!"

"She was wearing a brown suit!" said Tom.

"Hold it," cut in Whiz Walton. "She and Blaine were together. You talked to them last night, Weaver. You said they'd been together on the sunporch, and each alibied the other."

"That is what they told me, Walton. But I thought at the time they were lying. You see, the grass had been freshly cut. A few blades of grass were caught on both of Blaine's shoes and on one of Clara Nugent's. And there were a few bits of grass on the sunporch floor, just inside the door."

"Then the *two* o' them snooped into the library!" said Gulliver.

"Doesn't it seem so?"

"By gobs, it sure does!"

"Of course," said Weaver, "they may be simply curious and quite harmless. On the other hand, if they *are* dangerous, I don't propose to be unarmed."

"Weaver," said Whiz Walton, "you seem to have

joined our side. Maybe you'll tell us what you think of the insulin incident."

"Yo' got the answer to that?" asked Gulliver.

"No. I confess I'm perplexed about that." Weaver opened the gun, saw that it was fully loaded, then dropped it into the side pocket of his coat. "I think," he said, "I'd better return to the house and get ready for dinner. Coming with me?"

The quartet walked together to the house and the bedroom wing. Tom turned into the room that Whiz and Gulliver shared, while Weaver continued along the corridor to his own room.

"Well," said Tom, closing the door. "What do you make of Weaver's sudden burst of confidence?"

"I," muttered Gulliver, "don't like that critter. He's too slick-talkin'."

"I guess he's right about Clara and Blaine being the ones who entered the library," said Whiz. "But I think he's off the beam when he suspects they might be dangerous."

"I think they were just curious," said Tom. "Nevertheless, we'd better keep an eye on them."

CHAPTER 16

The Mysterious Attacker

At dinner, Hamilton Quest was silent and preoccupied. Deeply absorbed in his thoughts of the Inca problem, he was hardly aware of what he ate and wholly unaware of the tension-charged atmosphere. Tom, however, noticed the strained expressions on the faces of

several people at the table. Forbes Blaine and Clara Nugent seemed ill-at-ease and so did Bosworth. Weaver and C. Hollis Hall appeared to be composed, but disinclined to talk. Gulliver, having decided Bentley was a snooper, eyed the butler suspiciously and muttered under his breath each time he entered the dining room.

Margaret Bosworth, after failing in several attempts to start a general conversation, finally gave up and became as silent as the others. Dinner was concluded in silence.

Everyone seemed relieved when the meal was ended. No one lingered at the table.

Pleading a headache, Mrs. Bosworth said, "I'm sure no one will mind if I retire to my room."

"Go ahead," said Bosworth. Then to Hamilton Quest, "Are you going to work tonight?"

"Yes, John," replied the scientist. "Tom and I hope to finish the translation before we go to bed."

"Good!"

"We might as well get at it, Tom."

"I'm ready, Dad."

As Tom and his father left the room, Clara Nugent reminded Forbes Blaine, "You promised to suggest some changes in my play."

Blaine nodded and accompanied the writer to the sunporch.

Bosworth looked at the others and said, "Would anyone care to play billiards?"

"I would," said Weaver. "A little relaxation would be good for us."

"I don't play," said Whiz Walton. "But I'd like to watch."

"Same here," said Gulliver.

"How about you, Hall?" asked Bosworth. "Do you play billiards?"

"No," replied the scholarly-looking man. He smiled and added, "I'll tell you what I would like to do."

"What?"

"I'd like to spend the evening browsing in your library. You have some fine books there."

"Go ahead. Browse to your heart's content."

"Thank you."

"Follow me," said Bosworth to the others. "The billiard room is in the basement."

In the bedroom, before starting work, Tom told his father about the replacement of Charlie by the man who called himself Riley, and about Daniel Weaver sending to New York for a gun.

Mr. Quest chuckled. "Weaver frightens easily," he said.

"Maybe so, Dad. But you know how concerned the man in Washington was. He said the Communists would give a lot to know the location of a uranium deposit in Peru—or any other South American country, for that matter."

"Let's forget the Communists, Tom, and get to work." The scientist sat down at the worktable.

"One more thing, Dad. I want to tell you why Mr. Weaver sent for his gun." Tom repeated what the attorney had said about Forbes Blaine having a weapon and about the evidence indicating that Blaine and Clara Nugent had, despite their denials, entered the library.

Tom's father remained unimpressed. "Even if they did sneak into the library," he said, "that doesn't make them criminals who are capable of committing murder. Now let us forget these petty suspicions and finish interpreting that Inca writing."

"All right, Dad, but—" Tom paused.

"But what, son?"

"Well, I—I don't know how to explain it," Tom said falteringly, "but I—have a feeling that something's going to happen in this house." He laughed nervously. "Sort of a—a feeling of something impending."

"Imagination!"

"Maybe so, Dad."

"Right here," Quest tapped the gold medallion with his index finger, "is the place to apply that imagination."

"Yes, sir."

At first Tom found it hard to concentrate and get back into the laborious routine of searching through the reference books for specimens of picture writing that resembled the engraved figures, but presently he was once more working in stride. It was fascinating work, and each time a figure was decoded there was a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction. There was an indescribable thrill in wresting from the heavy gold

the message inscribed by an unknown craftsman who had been dead for hundreds of years.

Soon after midnight the work was finished. The engraving gave the name of the goldsmith, his place of birth, and a brief account of his life. It was directed to a new ruler of the Incas and seemed to be an application for a job as goldworker in the new palace that was under construction. The gold medallion was submitted as a sample of the craftsman's work.

Apparently the goldsmith wanted no misunderstanding. He made it clear that he had not carved the rock on which the gold charm was to be mounted. This, he explained, had been found in the ruins of a temple in the northern part of the Inca empire.

"This is splendid!" exclaimed Hamilton Quest.

"You were right about the stone, Dad. You said you thought it had come from the ruins of a building."

"From a *temple*," said Quest. "That means we've substantially narrowed down our search. Before we study the photographs of ruins, we'll discard everything except the pictures of temples."

"In the northern part of the Inca empire!"

"Yes!" Quest took the sheet of paper on which he had written the final translation and placed it in the table drawer. He gathered up all the notes that had been made, tore them into shreds, stepped into the bathroom, and flushed them down the drain.

"We've done a good night's work," he said. "To-

morrow we'll try to find a picture of the ruins from which the stone was taken."

"All right, Dad. Are you going to bed now?"

"Yes, Tom."

Tom said good night and opened the door. He was about to step into the corridor, but halted and said, "By the way, Dad, what time do you want to start work in the morning?"

Quest looked at his watch. "It's only about twelve-thirty," he said. "Let's start at nine."

"All right, Dad. I'll be ready."

"Good night, son."

"Good night." Tom stepped into the corridor and closed the door.

As he started toward his room, he saw Bentley lying on the floor.

"Golly!" he muttered, and raced to the man's side.

The butler sprawled on the carpeting between the door to Forbes Blaine's room and the door of the room occupied by Gulliver and Whiz Walton directly across the corridor.

Bentley was either unconscious or dead. His eyes were closed and his face was colorless.

Squatting beside the still form, Tom reached for the outflung left wrist to feel for a pulse. As he lifted the arm, several white cubes dropped from the butler's limp hand.

Bentley was alive. His pulse was firm and steady. Tom

loosened his black tie and unbuttoned his collar. Then he picked up one of the cubes.

Sugar! Cubes of the same size and shape that had been on the table during meals.

On the thick carpeting a silent figure approached Tom's back.

Tom was about to rise and see if Whiz and Gulliver were in their room when the blow descended. It was a vicious blow that could easily cause death; a blow known to men who had been trained as Commandos or Marines. It was delivered to a certain sensitive spot on Tom's neck with the edge of the assailant's stiff-fingered hand.

A mass of fiery stars seemed to explode in Tom's brain, and a throbbing sound beat at his eardrums.

CHAPTER 17

Conflicting Stories

One by one, the bright stars twinkled and went out. Then one tiny dot of light appeared and grew in size.

Tom heard someone say, "I think he's coming to."

"Tom. Wake up, son!" It was his father's voice.

The white light became a glow like the screen of a

television receiver. Vague figures appeared and became sharper, more distinct, and finally resolved themselves into familiar faces. Tom saw his father and Gulliver. Close behind them, also staring down anxiously, stood Whiz Walton and Forbes Blaine.

"Yo', Tom! Speak to us! Tell us yo're all right!" said Gulliver.

"Not yet, son," said Hamilton Quest. "Lie still for a few minutes."

"My—my neck," Tom muttered. He felt a wave of giddiness.

"Where?"

It took tremendous effort for Tom to lift his hand and touch a spot on the side of his neck.

His father's hand, strong, yet as gentle as the hand of a nurse, massaged the place. "There's a red mark there, Tom, as if something had struck you."

"I—I don't remember."

As the giddiness subsided, Tom realized for the first time that he lay on his own bed.

"Where's that glass of water?" asked Hamilton Quest.

"Here it is." Whiz Walton handed it to the scientist.

"I'll lift your head, son. Take a couple of swallows."

The water made Tom feel stronger. "I—I guess I'll be all right in a couple of minutes," he said. "What happened to Bentley?"

"Bentley?" repeated Quest. "What do you mean?"

"Something happened to him. I saw him lying in the corridor."

Quest looked at Forbes Blaine. "Do you know anything about Bentley?"

"No," replied Blaine. "Not a thing."

"Blaine found you, Tom," said Whiz.

"That's right," said Forbes Blaine. "I opened the door from the living room and there you were, lying right outside my bedroom door."

"Alone?"

"Yes. Quite alone. I couldn't imagine what had happened to you. I rapped on the door of your friends' room."

"Me an' Whiz was just sittin' there," said Gulliver, "chewin' the rag about the billiard game we'd been watchin' when Blaine rapped on our door. I brought yo' here to yo' bed while Whiz went for yo' dad."

"Feel like trying to sit up, son?"

"Yes, Dad."

"I'll help you."

The movement brought a return of the dizziness, but only for a moment.

"The color is back in your face. I'm sure you'll soon be all right."

"I'll be all right, Dad."

"What happened to you?"

"I don't know. When I left your room, I saw Bentley lying on the floor. He was unconscious and had a handful of lumps of sugar."

"Sugar!" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "What was that for?"

Tom shook his head. "I don't know. That's all I remember until I woke up here."

"D'yo'," said Gulliver, "mean to say Bentley was stretched out cold where we found yo'?"

"Yes," insisted Tom.

The big man scratched his chin with his spadelike thumbnail and shook his head slowly. "I can't figure out how him an' yo' could both be knocked out without me an' Whiz hearin' anythin'."

"The doors and walls of this house are very thick," said Blaine. "Practically soundproof."

"How long was I unconscious?" Tom asked.

Quest looked at his watch. "About twenty-five minutes."

"Yo' got any idea who did it, Tom?" asked Gulliver.

"No."

"By thunder, if I git my hands on the critter, I'll unravel his spine! If there's anything gits under my skin, it's a yellow coyote that hits a man from behind."

"I'd like to know about Bentley," Tom said. "He must have been attacked by the same person who hit me."

"When we went to our room after watching the billiard game," said Whiz, "we found that the bed had been turned down. And so was your bed. So I guess Bentley had made his rounds."

"Someone had better tell John Bosworth about this," said Quest. "Also Daniel Weaver and Mr. Hall."

"I'll tell 'em," said Whiz. "I'll probably find Bosworth and Weaver in the billiard room."

"As late as this?"

Whiz nodded. "They'd started betting big money when Gulliver and I left them. The way they were going, I'd say they're in for a late session." He opened the door, went wide-eyed, and exclaimed, "Bentley!"

"Yes, Mr. Walton?" replied the butler as if nothing had happened.

"Step in here for a minute, will you please?"

The normally impassive Bentley seemed a bit surprised to see so many of the guests gathered in the room.

"Bentley," said Tom, "are you all right?"

"I? Why, yes. Of course I am all right."

"B—but just half an hour ago, I found you in the corridor. You were lying on the floor and you were unconscious."

"Please pardon me for disagreeing with you," said Bentley levelly, "but you are mistaken."

"I am not mistaken!" said Tom. "I saw you there. I loosened your collar and tie! You had a handful of sugar."

"A—a what?"

"A handful of sugar!"

The butler looked questioningly at Hamilton Quest, then at the others. "I can't understand why the young man should make such a statement," he said.

"Because it's the truth!" said Tom angrily. "You—"

"Just a moment, Tom," interrupted Hamilton Quest. To Bentley, he said, "I'm sure my son saw someone in the corridor. Is there anyone here who might be mistaken for you?"

"Not that I know of, Mr. Quest."

"Where were you half an hour ago?"

"Half an hour ago?" Bentley pondered and looked at his watch. "Let me see," he murmured. "After preparing the beds, I went to the kitchen and made sandwiches which I took to the billiard room."

"What time was that?" asked Whiz.

"I remember glancing at the kitchen clock. It was just twelve-fifteen."

Whiz said, "That's just about the time Gulliver and I left the billiard room."

Bentley nodded. "Mr. Bosworth said you had just left. He asked me to bring down some coffee, so I returned to the kitchen. I made a second trip to the basement with the coffee, then, seeing that lights were burning in the library, I went in to turn them out, but found that Mr. Hall was there reading."

"What time was that?"

"I should say, Mr. Walton, that it must have been very close to twelve-thirty." Bentley turned to Hamilton Quest. "If it is important, Mr. Quest, that I prove where I was, I'd appreciate it if you would ask Mr. Hall to step in here."

"Is he in his room?"

"Yes. Shall I call him?"

"I'll do it," said Whiz. He left the room and rapped on the door directly across the corridor. "Hall," he called. "Are you in there?"

The door was opened by Hall, who wore pajamas and a blue robe. He held a half-eaten sandwich in his hand.

"Will you step into Tom Quest's room?"

"Something wrong?" asked the thin man.

"We'd like to ask you a couple of questions, if you don't mind."

"Very well." Hall took a bite out of the sandwich as he followed the columnist into the crowded bedroom. He lifted his eyebrows questioningly.

"We'll explain in just a minute, Hall," said Whiz. "But first, we'd like to confirm the time that Bentley saw you in the library."

"The time?"

"When I asked you if you'd like a bite to eat before retiring, sir," said Bentley.

"Oh, yes. I'd say it was about twelve-thirty, give or take five minutes."

"Then what?" asked Gulliver.

"What is this?" asked Hall heatedly. "A third degree?" He looked at Tom. "What happened?"

"Yo' just answer my question," Gulliver said.

"What's your question?"

"What'd yo' an' Bentley do after he saw yo' in the library at half past twelve—give or take five minutes?"

"Bentley asked me if I wanted something to eat. I

said I'd like a sandwich. I asked Bentley to bring it to my room."

"I went to the kitchen," said Bentley, "prepared the sandwich and brought it to Mr. Hall. I had just taken it to his room when you," he looked at Whiz, "opened this door and asked me to come in here."

"Now," said C. Hollis Hall, "I'd appreciate knowing what's up."

"Someone slugged Tom!" said Gulliver.

"What?" The man from the Atomic Energy Commission looked incredulous. "Slugged him?"

"Attacked from behind an' knocked him out while he was tryin' to help Bentley, who'd already been knocked out an' was layin' on the floor in that there corridor!"

"But I told you—" began Bentley.

"With lump sugar in his hand!" finished Gulliver.

"Were you knocked out, too, Bentley?" asked Hall sharply.

"No, sir."

"Tom says you was!" barked Gulliver. "An' as far as I'm concerned, that settles it! Now I want to know why yo're lyin' about it, an' why Hall is backin' yo' lies!"

Bentley flushed and looked angry.

Hall's voice became sharper. "I'm not backing up anybody's lies," he snapped. To Tom, he said, "What time were you knocked out?"

"About half-past twelve."

"Just about the time Bentley and I were together in the library."

Tom's head was aching and he was somewhat confused by the strange turn of events. "I—I don't see how I could have been mistaken," he said. "I know someone lay unconscious on the floor and I'd be willing to swear that it was Bentley."

"If it wasn't Bentley," put in Gulliver, "then there must be someone who looks a lot like him. An' if that's the case, who is he an' where's he at right now?"

Hamilton Quest said, "Tom has put in a long day of very tiring work. I think it would be best to leave him alone and let him sleep."

"Good idea," said Whiz. "We'll all get out."

Hall said, "Does Mr. Bosworth know about this?"

"No, but I'll tell him right away," the columnist said.

All except Tom and his father left the room.

"Dad, right now I hardly know what to say."

"Don't say anything, son. Just try to get some sleep."

"But I know I saw Bentley. I'm not mistaken about that, Dad."

"We'll talk about it in the morning."

"Do *you* think I imagined it?"

"Frankly, Tom, I don't know what to think."

"I know it's hard to believe that Bentley would lie about being knocked out, but—"

"We are," interrupted the scientist, "sure of one thing!"

"What's that, Dad?"

"Someone knocked you out! That fact convinces me that Weaver's apprehensions and suspicions may be well founded. Certain precautions are called for. After I leave the room, please lock your door from the inside."

"All right, Dad. You do the same."

"I shall," nodded his father. "Do you want me to help you undress and get into bed?"

"It's not necessary, Dad. I'm all right now. Just a headache, but that'll be gone by morning."

CHAPTER 18

Blaine Talks

After leaving Tom, C. Hollis Hall walked stiffly across the corridor and entered his room without speaking.

Bentley looked at Forbes Blaine, Whiz, and Gulliver. "I am very sorry it was necessary for me to contradict

the young man, but as you see, he was obviously mistaken."

"He must have been," said Blaine.

"Tom don't often make mistakes," muttered Gulliver. "There's somethin' mighty funny about this deal."

Whiz said, "We'd better report to Bosworth and Weaver."

"If you wish," said Bentley, "I will go with you."

"Never mind, Bentley."

"Very well, Mr. Walton. In that case, I'll go to my room." The butler left the corridor.

Blaine said, "There is no need for me to go with you to the billiard room."

"Yo' better come along," said Gulliver.

"I'm sure you and Mr. Walton can tell what happened without my help."

"There's some questions for yo' to answer, Blaine."

"But I don't know anything. I told you I saw your young friend lying on the floor and immediately rapped on the door of your room."

Gulliver gripped Blaine's arm. "I'm takin' this arm down to the billiard room. Yo' can come along or not. Let's git gittin', Whiz."

The big man started suddenly, almost jerking Forbes Blaine off his feet. "I'll go with you!" cried Blaine. "Let go of me!"

In the billiard room, Bosworth laughed heartily as he made the final shot. "That does it, Weaver. A hundred bucks you owe me!"

"Your game has improved, John. You must have been practicing." The overweight attorney took out his wallet, extracted a one-hundred-dollar bill and handed it to Bosworth.

At that moment, Gulliver came down the stairs, dragging Blaine. Whiz Walton followed.

"Yo', Bosworth," said the big Texan. "We got things to tell yo'!"

"Make him let go of me!" cried Blaine. "He's almost broken my arm!"

"What's going on?" asked Bosworth.

"Plenty. Yo' tell 'em, Whiz."

As briefly as possible, the columnist told all that he knew about the attack on Tom and the subsequent discussion with Bentley.

"Bentley did bring us sandwiches and coffee," said Bosworth. "At least that part of his story is true."

"What time did he bring the snack?" Whiz asked.

"I don't know. Do you, Weaver?"

"No," replied the lawyer. "But if Bentley says it was around twelve-thirty, I've no reason to doubt it."

"I," said Gulliver, "am goin' to find out who clouted Tom an' make the sneakin' polecat sorry. Meanwhile," he turned to Blaine, "I hanker to make yo' swallow a lie!"

Blaine saw the rage in Gulliver's face. "Wha-what do you m-mean?" he stammered.

"I wouldn't o' minded yo' tellin' a fib last night if Tom hadn't been knocked out. But now that there's

someone in this house who slugs without warnin', it's time we cleared the air as far as yo're concerned." Gulliver took the brown button from his pocket. "Last night I showed yo' this. Remember?"

"Yes, of course."

"I gave yo' the chance to tell the truth about sneakin' into the library."

"I told you—"

"Hogwash!"

"I tell you, I didn't lose that button—"

"Clara Nugent lost it! An' her an' yo' was together. Ain't that true?"

Desperately Blaine looked at Bosworth and Weaver. Both men wore stern expressions.

"Answer me!" barked Gulliver. "Tell the truth before I git my bristles up!"

"I—I—we—" Blaine cleared his throat. "We meant no harm."

"Did yo' an' Clara unlock the library door?"

"Yes, but—"

"Did yo' an' Clara go into the library?"

"Well—uh—Miss Nugent didn't go in. I stepped in for just a moment. Then I—I heard someone opening the door from the living room, and I—"

"Yo' turned tail an' ran!"

"Well, I—I left."

"Then why'd yo' an' Clara Nugent lie about it?"

Gulliver's aggressive manner had completely shattered Blaine's poise. He moistened his lips with the tip of his

tongue, cleared his throat, and spoke falteringly. "I—we—that is, we didn't mean to lie. We—uh—we fibbed a little, but—"

"A fib's a lie!" snapped Gulliver succinctly. "Why'd yo' lie?"

"W-well, it—it seemed so silly. We—uh—that is, it would have made us look foolish to admit that we were curious enough about that Inca stone to—to go as we did to take a look at it—"

"Why were yo' two interested in that hunk o' rock?"

Blaine looked at the stony face of Bosworth and Weaver and cried out, "How long is this to continue? This man has no right to cross-question me like this! I know my legal rights! I don't have to submit to this treatment!" To Gulliver, he said, "I refuse to answer any more questions!"

Gulliver's left hand shot out and grabbed a fistful of Blaine's shirt and coat. Blaine found himself lifted almost off his feet and saw Gulliver's angry face within six inches of his own.

Gulliver spoke slowly, his voice dripping with threat. "Blaine, I don't know a doggoned thing about law. But I know that a prowlin' neck-thwacker is loose in this here house. I know that the pussy-footin' critter knocked out Tom Quest. On account o' that, I aim to ask questions an' git answers."

"Let me go! I didn't have anything to do with the attack on Tom Quest! I found him lying in the corridor, just as I told you! Please let me go!"

Gulliver went on as if there had been no interruption. "Yo' ain't answered my last question, Blaine. I asked yo' why in tarnation yo' an' Clara were interested in that Inca relic."

"Because of Mrs. Bosworth," cried Blaine.

Bosworth spoke sharply. "What about my wife?"

Gulliver released his grip on Blaine's clothes. "Talk some more," he said.

The discomfited man addressed his remark to Bosworth. "Clara told me how terribly worried your wife has been."

"Worried about what?" demanded Bosworth.

"About you! She noticed how upset you've been since Mr. Quest's last visit, and knew that it was in some way connected with that Inca stone."

"How did she know that? I told her nothing about it."

"Because for years that relic had stood on the pedestal in your library. But after Mr. Quest was here, you locked it in your vault. And from then on, you were worried and nervous. So your wife put two and two together—"

"What did she tell Clara Nugent?"

"I don't know, Mr. Bosworth, but she asked Clara to learn all she could about the Inca relic; asked her to try to find out if it had greater value than anyone had suspected."

Bosworth looked thoughtful. "I didn't realize Margaret was worried," he muttered, half to Weaver and

half to himself. To Blaine, he said, "So my wife asked Miss Nugent to find out about the Inca relic?"

"Yes," replied Blaine. He was once again composed and spoke with apparent sincerity. "Miss Nugent secured photographs of the stone and showed them to someone in a museum who told her that it had no great historic or intrinsic value."

"Miss Nugent confided all this to you?"

"Yes," replied Blaine.

"Is that why you came here with her at this particular time?" Whiz Walton asked.

"No. I'll tell you why I'm here. I've known Clara Nugent for some time. Recently, she mentioned you, Mr. Bosworth. I told her I knew you through a couple of New York clubs to which we both belong. I said I'd heard a lot about your island and hoped some day to know you well enough to be invited here. Well, Clara said she and Mrs. Bosworth were old friends. She said she could bring me here, but I'd have to pay for it."

"Pay for it!" exclaimed Bosworth.

Blaine smiled thinly. "By listening to a reading of her play. She was sure that, having heard it, I'd be interested in helping to back its production."

"Is it any good?"

"It has merit, Mr. Bosworth. With revisions, it might be successful. But to go on with my explanation, I checked my calendar and found that this week end was the only one I had free. So Clara brought me here at this time."

Whiz Walton asked, "What about unlocking the library door?"

"I knew nothing about that Inca relic until last evening. After Clara finished reading the play, she told me about Mrs. Bosworth's concern for Mr. Bosworth, and her suspicion that his—uh—let us say his apprehension was connected with the Inca relic. Clara suggested that we go to the library to see if the stone had been brought out of the vault, and if so, to try to learn why it was so important. That's all there is to it. It is as simple as that."

Bosworth looked at Weaver. "He tells a convincing story."

The attorney nodded.

"What do you think, Gulliver?" asked Whiz.

"I can tell when a man's speakin' true facts," replied the big man grimly. "An' much as I hate to say so, I figure Blaine's come clean."

"Thanks," said Blaine crisply.

"Why do you hate to admit it, Gulliver?" asked Bosworth.

"Because," Gulliver complained, "there's no longer any reason to suspect that Blaine's the one who whomped Tom Quest. I got to look farther to find that cat-footin' sidewinder."

CHAPTER 19

Marks of a Prowler

TOM QUEST overslept.

It was after eight o'clock Sunday morning when he wakened, more slowly than usual, with mixed-up fragments of recollection whirling in his brain. In his mind's eye he saw Bentley lying unconscious in the corridor

while his memory echoed the butler's flat denial that Tom had seen any such thing. The Inca message had been deciphered. This recollection brought a surge of elation which was quickly damped when a slight head movement brought a painful reminder of the attack by an unknown assailant.

Tom sat up in bed and massaged the sides and back of his neck while moving his head up and down and sideways until the lamed and stiffened muscles had been limbered up.

Hearing Gulliver's raspy voice rumbling resonantly, Tom stepped out of bed, pulled on his robe, and went through the bathroom to the other bedroom.

"Yo', Tom! How d'yo' feel?"

"I'm all right, Gulliver." Tom greeted his father and Whiz Walton, who were also in the room.

"Are you sure you're all right, son?"

"Yes, Dad. My neck was a little stiff, but it's all right now."

"Let me see." Quest placed his slender fingers on the side of his son's neck. "A little swollen." He pressed down. "Hurt?"

"Just a little."

"I think someone used a judo blow. It might have been fatal."

"I'm glad it wasn't." Tom grinned cheerfully.

"Tom, have you a clear recollection of last night's events?"

"Yes, Dad. I remember leaving your room and seeing Bentley on the floor in the corridor."

"You remember seeing *someone* on the floor—"

"Bentley! I don't care what he says, Dad. I know he's the one I saw there. I even remember the mole on his chin."

"Tom, we know Bentley was in the library at the time you left my room."

"He couldn't have been!"

"Mr. Hall talked to him there."

"I don't care what Mr. Hall said!" Tom flared angrily. "Mr. Hall is either mistaken about the time, or lying to give Bentley an alibi!"

Quest shook his head slowly and spoke patiently. "C. Hollis Hall is a brilliant man and a responsible one. The integrity of any man connected with the Atomic Energy Commission must be unquestionable. We simply cannot doubt his word. Moreover, son, what possible motive could there be for Bentley to make his denials if they were untrue?"

Tom's momentary anger gave way to a feeling of frustration. "All right, Dad," he said. "There's no use arguing about it."

"Are you sure you saw someone in the corridor?"

"Oh, Dad, do you think I was having hallucinations?"

"No. I—I guess not. You must have seen someone who closely resembled the butler."

"Listen to this," said Whiz Walton. "Suppose some-

one who wanted to snoop around in this house disguised himself as Bentley. Someone saw through the disguise and called him on it. There was a struggle, and he was knocked out—just as you found him."

"Mebbe that's it," said Gulliver quickly. "We already know there was someone snoopin' around the outside o' the house."

"What's that?" Tom asked.

"Gulliver found footprints," Whiz Walton explained.

"That's right, Tom. I was up early this mornin', an' went out to take a look around. I saw some muddy prints on the flagstones in the patio an' got curious."

"They must have been made last night," put in the newshound, "because those flagstones were swept late yesterday afternoon."

"The footprints," Gulliver continued, "showed where someone had stopped at each o' the windows on this side o' the wing o' the house."

"Where did the prowler get mud on his shoes?" Tom asked.

"He did that when he was lookin' through the windows on the other side o' this bedroom wing. There's dirt close to the house where the shrubs are planted. But by the time I got there, that newcomer was rakin' the ground."

"Who?"

"Riley. The man who's working in Charlie's place," Whiz said.

"He was rakin' the ground," Gulliver said. "He told me he hadn't noticed any footprints."

"I'd like to know," Whiz said, "why he was out so early doing the gardener's work."

"Charlie always helped the gardener," Hamilton Quest said. "That was part of his job."

"Oh." Whiz nodded.

"Golly," said Tom soberly. "If someone was looking into the bedrooms—" He broke off suddenly, then said, "Gulliver, do you think you can identify those footprints?"

"I could've, if I'd seen clear outlines in the garden before that Riley got to rakin'."

"Aren't the footprints clear on the flagstones in the patio?"

Gulliver shook his head. "Nope. They ain't really footprints. They're just globs o' mud that fell off'n someone's shoes. But I know the mud came from the other side o' the bedroom wing where Blaine, Hall, an' Weaver sleep, because there's a lot o' that white fertilizer stuff mixed in with it."

"Getting back to what I was saying," said the columnist, "if that prowler wanted to snoop inside the house, he'd be smart to disguise himself as Bentley. Anyone seeing him enter, wouldn't pay any attention to him."

"Even if the man I saw were an impostor," said Tom, "how do you account for the person who knocked *me* out?"

"That's one of many things I can't account for. As I see it," the newshound said, "there are two unknowns. The man you saw on the floor and the man who knocked you out."

"It's hard figurin'," observed Gulliver, "especially on an empty stomach. Yo' hurry an' git dressed, Tom, an' we'll git ourselves some breakfast."

"I'll be ready," Tom replied, "in five minutes."

The frank and embarrassing admissions made the night before by Forbes Blaine seemed to have struck a sympathetic chord in Bosworth and Weaver. The two men greeted the New York promoter cordially when he entered the sunporch and sat down at the breakfast table shortly after Tom and his father and friends had finished their orange juice. Blaine looked grateful and responded to the friendly warmth by shedding some of his sophistication.

As on the previous morning, the ladies took breakfast in their rooms.

The others were nearly through eating when C. Hollis Hall came to the table with apologies for being late.

"I took a book to bed with me," he said, "and read most of the night." He looked at Hamilton Quest, smiled tightly, and said, "I suppose, when you have anything you think I should know, you'll tell me."

"I have something to tell all of you," replied Tom's father. "We have completed the deciphering of the message on the back of the Inca medallion."

"Fine!" said Bosworth.

Hall said, "Was it worthwhile? Or shouldn't I ask?"

"It was worthwhile."

Bosworth looked at Blaine and said, "I suppose you're wondering what this is all about."

"Naturally," replied Blaine.

"I'd like to tell both you and my wife, but I'm pledged to secrecy."

"My report should be completed this evening," said Hamilton Quest. "When I telephone for instructions regarding the disposition of it, I'll ask if the secrecy must be maintained any longer."

"Are you going to report the attack on Tom?" asked Weaver.

"No."

Bosworth frowned. "I'd like to know who did that," he said. "And I'd like to know who dropped that hypodermic kit!"

"And who," put in Whiz Walton, "Tom saw on the floor!"

"And why," Tom added, "the man I found had a handful of lump sugar."

"I think the police should be notified about that attack," said C. Hollis Hall. "Obviously there's a dangerous person around here. As a matter of fact, I think the police should have been notified last night—if there really *was* an assault."

Gulliver was about to make an explosive comment,

but Tom placed a quieting hand on his arm and looked squarely into the observer's watery, blue eyes as he said, "There was!"

Weaver said, "We cannot maintain the secrecy that is called for if we bring in the police."

Hall shrugged his shoulders and said, "It's up to you."

"And to Hamilton Quest," added the attorney. "If he or his son insist on reporting the assault to the police—"

"No," said Tom.

"By no means," agreed his father.

Breakfast was concluded with no mention made of the footprints Gulliver had found.

CHAPTER 20

End of the Search

AFTER BREAKFAST, Tom and his father headed for the bedroom to start on the day's work. Gulliver and Whiz Walton followed as far as the big central hall, but there the columnist said, "This way, Gulliver," and turned to the left to go through the hall's rear door to the patio.

"What're we out here for?" asked Gulliver. "What's on yo' mind, Whiz?"

"Precautionary measures." Whiz Walton picked up one of the lounging chairs and carried it along the side of the patio to a spot directly in front of the French doors from Hamilton Quest's room. He rapped on the window and grinned when Tom looked out.

Tom unlocked and opened the door. "What's up?"

"Guard duty. Gulliver and I are going to take turns sitting right here outside the door."

"So that's it," said Gulliver. "Now that's a downright good idea!" He sat down in the chair, drew his heavy gun from the shoulder holster, and placed it in his lap. "I'll take the first hitch, Whiz. An' if anyone comes snoopin', I'll make 'em feel as popular as a wet dog at a parlor social."

Hamilton Quest came to the door and said, "Tom was just suggesting that we take precautionary measures."

"We're takin' 'em for yo'," grinned Gulliver. "Yo' just git to work, an' don't worry about anyone eavesdroppin'. If yo' want anything, just open the door an' tell me or Whiz, whichever is here."

"Thank you." Quest closed the door, then pulled the cord that drew the heavy drapes together on a traverse rod.

"Now, Tom," he said, "let's—"

"Just a minute, Dad. Speaking of precautions—"

"But we needn't go into that now, Tom. With our

friends on guard outside, we've nothing to worry about."

"I was going to suggest something different, Dad. I thought of fastening your Leica camera on the side wall. With the wide-angle lens, it would cover practically the whole room. Then we could rig a flash, so that when the door is opened—"

"We'd make a picture of anyone who entered," finished Quest. "No, Tom. "I don't want to waste any more time. I want to get on with our work. We'll simply keep the hall door locked. I have two keys. Here, you take one and I'll keep one."

"But—"

Quest picked up a bulky envelope. "These are the photographs with which we are concerned."

Tom knew that further discussion of his plan was useless. He remained silent while his father removed over two hundred glossy pictures from the envelope.

Hamilton Quest had gone to a great deal of painstaking effort to collect the photographs from friends and acquaintances who had access to Inca archives in museums. The pictures had all been taken in Peru and nearly every one of the ancient Inca buildings was represented. Even the long lost buildings of the mountain-top city called Manchu Piccu. Some of the buildings were almost intact; others were in ruins. Each picture was sharp enough to show the most minute details of the individual stones. In most cases one or two additional pictures were clipped to the original. These had

been skillfully made by Hamilton Quest. He had isolated a small area of the picture, rephotographed it, and enlarged it so marks of the tools that had cut the stones and the manner in which the stonemason had handled those tools could be clearly seen.

"Each of these is labeled, Tom," said Quest as he handed about half of the pictures to his son. "We'll go through them and eliminate everything except the temples."

The Incas had built a lot of temples. After the culling was completed, less than fifty per cent of the pictures had been discarded. Hamilton Quest referred to the deciphered message that had been found on the back of the gold medallion. "In the northern part of the Inca Empire," he muttered. "Now we'll eliminate more of the photos."

At the end of this second culling, just nineteen different buildings were represented by the photographs.

"Now the easy part is done," Quest said. "We must compare each of these to the picture of the radioactive stone until we find the one in which the craftsmanship and toolwork are identical."

"Identical!" exclaimed Tom. "Will that be possible?"

"I hope so. We'll have to make extremely accurate measurements, then adjust them to compensate for the difference in diameters of enlargement."

A few of the pictures could be readily discarded, but the rest required very careful scrutiny under magnifiers.

Tom and his father worked side by side, speaking only to make murmured comments when a final decision to reject a picture had been reached.

When only ten of the photographs remained to be studied, someone rapped on the glass of the French door.

"Who is it?" called Tom.

"It's me. Gulliver."

Tom drew back the drapes, unlocked and opened the door. "Anything wrong?"

"Only that yo' an' yo' dad are likely to starve. Don't yo' want no lunch?"

Quest looked at his watch. "I declare, it's two o'clock!"

Whiz Walton appeared, carrying a tray holding two quarts of milk, glasses, and a stack of sandwiches wrapped in foil. "We assumed you didn't want to interrupt your work," he said, "so we asked Mrs. Bentley to make some sandwiches for you."

"Golly," said Tom, "that's great!" He placed the food and milk on a small table.

"Thank you," said Quest. "That was thoughtful of you."

"Anythin' else yo' want?" asked Gulliver.

"No, thanks."

"If there is, just let us know. One of us'll be outside yo' door."

At half-past two, Quest said, "Discard it, Tom."

"Nine to go," said Tom, picking up another picture

from the small pile. It was rejected after forty-five minutes of minute measurement and careful study. The next one was discarded in only half an hour.

"Seven to go, Dad."

"Um-m."

"What if none of these has the same tool and worker marks as the stone that's radioactive?"

"If that proves to be the case," said Quest, "I know of no way to trace the stone."

At half-past six, Tom picked up one of the three remaining pictures. He was about to hand it to his father when his eye fell on the picture that had been beneath it. He picked this up. "Dad, look here."

"Yes, Tom?"

Tom pointed to the lower left-hand corner of the picture. "Here are a lot of triangular stones, the same shape as the one with the medallion."

Quest scanned the picture. In the portion of the building that had remained standing, it was apparent that the designer had departed from the usual procedure and had laid up the stones to form a pattern involving the use of many triangular sections.

"Let's take this one next," said Tom.

Quest detached the enlargements of some of the details and began the routine measurements. His first result was failure. But more than one stonemason had worked on the building. He studied the cutting of another stone, a third, and then a fourth.

Tom heard a sharp intake of breath and looked at his father. "Maybe," murmured the scientist. His voice was barely audible. "Closer than any of the others." He picked up a stronger magnifier and said, "Calipers."

Tom placed the instrument in his father's hand.

"Take down dimensions."

Tom ripped off the used sheet of a scratch pad and on the fresh sheet jotted down dimensions as his father called them.

"Multiply by point eight nine six," said Quest.

As Tom did the simple arithmetic to compensate for the fact that the picture was on a slightly larger scale than the one of the uranium ore, he saw that the results were going to come very close to tallying. "I think we have it, Dad!" he whispered tensely.

Quest took his microscope out of the case while Tom adjusted a light. After another fifteen minutes of concentrated study, the scientist raised his head, took a small notebook and pencil from his pocket, and said, "Turn that picture over, Tom. The location of the ruins is written on the back."

Tom read it aloud, and his father entered it in the notebook.

"That," said Hamilton Quest as he stretched and rubbed his tired eyes, "is where the Peruvian Government should find uranium."

"Golly, Dad, you did it!"

"*We* did it, son. Now we have only to protect the

secret until my friend in Washington gives us instructions."

Though neither Tom nor his father realized it, this was to be the most difficult and dangerous part of the undertaking!

CHAPTER 21

Drugged Coffee

TOM BROUGHT the phone from Whiz Walton's room and plugged it in so his father could make the call to Washington. The connection was quickly established. Quest told his friend of the successful outcome of the endeavor and received instructions.

"I am to type a complete report," he told Tom, "and hand it to a government agent who will call here for it in person."

"When?"

"Probably tomorrow. He'll identify himself by using a code word."

"Did you forget to ask how long the secrecy must be maintained?"

"I didn't have to ask," smiled Quest. "I was told to forget the whole thing and ask the others whom we've trusted to do likewise."

"Are you going to type the report now?"

"No, Tom. I'm going to enjoy a hot tub and relax until dinnertime. This evening I'll think over what I wish to say in the report and type it before I retire."

At the dinner table, Hamilton Quest announced that his work was finished. Weaver and Bosworth extended hearty congratulations.

Then C. Hollis Hall stood up and formally addressed himself to Mrs. Bosworth, Miss Nugent, and Forbes Blaine. "You ladies," he said, "do not know the nature of Mr. Quest's work because it has, of necessity, been classified as 'Top Secret.' But I want you to know that your friend has rendered a great service to our nation. One which, I am sure, will earn for him Congressional recognition." He turned to Quest. "I salute you, sir," he said and sat down.

A few minutes later, as the scientist was leaving the table, Hall moved to his side and said, "Naturally, Mr.

Quest, I'm keenly interested in hearing all of the details. I hope you'll be able to call Washington tonight."

"I have already talked to Washington."

"Oh." Hall lifted his eyebrows. "Were you instructed to turn over your report to me?"

"No, Mr. Hall."

"You were not?" Hall's surprise seemed genuine. "But I can't understand that. It was my understanding that I came here expressly to receive that report and carry it back to Washington."

"Apparently there was a change made in the plans after you left Washington."

"Is your report ready?"

"No. I plan to prepare it tonight."

"What are you to do with it?"

"I have my instructions, Mr. Hall. And I've been given no authority to tell them to you."

Hall's face flushed in annoyance. "Very well," he said and walked away.

"You were rather rough on him," said Bosworth, who had heard the exchange.

"I'm sorry, John," said Quest. "Perhaps my nerves are a bit on edge."

"Then why don't you turn in early and get a good night's rest?"

"I must write my report."

"Will that take long?"

"A couple of hours of planning, then perhaps an hour of typing."

"Do you want me to do the typing for you, Dad?" asked Tom.

"No thank you, son. I want to work alone on it. I think better."

"Mr. Quest."

Quest turned quickly. "Oh, Bentley, I didn't know you were behind me."

"Sorry, sir, if I startled you. I just wanted to ask if you wanted a thermos of coffee."

"I?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Gulliver asked that I have a large thermos prepared for him and Mr. Walton. He explained, sir, that they planned a—er—a vigil."

"Oh," Quest laughed. To Bosworth, he explained, "They're going to take turns standing—or rather sitting on guard outside my door."

"That's not a bad idea," said Bosworth.

"If you are to be working late, Mr. Quest, and wish to have coffee available—"

"No, no," interrupted the scientist. "I'll not need coffee. I expect to have my work all finished by midnight."

"Yes, sir." Bentley withdrew.

Tom spent the evening sitting beside Whiz Walton in the patio just outside the door of his father's room. Gulliver, meanwhile, anticipating a long night watch, slept through the early hours.

Closed draperies cut off the view into the bedroom, but presently Tom heard the clicking of a typewriter.

"Dad's started writing the report," he said to Whiz.

A few minutes later, Gulliver's voice came out of the darkness. "Yo' there, Whiz?"

"Yes."

The big man's heavy boots thudded on the stones. "By thunder," he said, "it's a dark night."

"Overcast," said Tom.

"Oh, yo' here, Tom? It's so dark I couldn't see yo'. It's eleven o'clock, Whiz. Time for me to start watchin'."

"Good." The columnist got up and stretched. "I'll set my alarm for five, then come to relieve you."

"That'll do," replied Gulliver, settling himself in the chair that the columnist had vacated. "I stopped by the kitchen an' got the jug o' coffee Bentley fixed for me. D'yo' want a cup before yo' go?"

"No, thanks. It might keep me awake. I'll see you at five."

"Gulliver, I'm going to leave you, too," said Tom. "I'll look in on Dad, then hit the sack."

"Sleep tight, Tom."

"Right. Good night."

"Night."

Sitting alone in the darkness, Gulliver listened to the slow beat of Hamilton Quest's two-finger typing. It was a warm night and the air was motionless. Gulliver knew that the hours would drag and was glad he had brought along the coffee.

He unscrewed the cap of the thermos bottle, filled it

and sipped. It was not particularly good coffee. Gulliver decided that it had probably been left from dinner and reheated. But it was hot and strong.

He emptied the cap and replaced it on the bottle, then leaned back in the reclining chair. The chair seemed more comfortable than it had during the day. Gulliver felt wholly relaxed. He listened to the steady pecking at the typewriter.

"Doggone," he muttered. "Just hearin' that sound makes a man sleepy." He poured another cup of coffee and drank it. "That oughtta do it," he told himself.

A few minutes later he could barely hear the typing. With an exclamation of dismay, he realized that he'd been lying back in the chair with his eyes closed, and that he'd been almost asleep.

"I'll git up an' walk around," he told himself. But as he tried to rise, his legs felt numb. He knew something was wrong. His tongue felt thick; he had no feeling in his fingers, and the sound of the typewriter seemed to come from far, far away.

"The—the coffee—" he gasped. "It—it had somethin' in it. I gotta let—Quest—know—"

He tried to shout, but no sound came. He felt as if dense black clouds were closing in, stifling him, congealing every sense. And then he seemed to be slipping, falling into a black void that had no bottom.

CHAPTER 22

Gunsmoke

HAMILTON QUEST finished typing his report. He read it carefully, then put it into his briefcase and prepared for bed. He tried the hall door to make sure it was locked, put out the light, crawled between the cool sheets, and sighed with the utter relaxation that comes

with the knowledge that a difficult job has been well done. A few minutes later, he was asleep.

Tom Quest was still up and dressed. Whiz Walton had just left Tom's room after stopping for a little while to rehash the strange things that had not yet been explained. Now Tom still thought of those things. The hypodermic and the insulin that no one had claimed . . . Bentley lying unconscious—and he was sure that it had been Bentley . . . the knockout blow on the neck.

The Inca relic had crowded all these other problems into the background of Tom's mind. But now, with the main issue disposed of, things of lesser importance came to the fore. No one, not even his father, truly believed he was right in identifying Bentley as the unconscious man in the corridor. How could he prove that he had been right?

He had a vivid recollection of Bentley on the floor —his outstretched hand—the lumps of sugar. He remembered lifting the hand to feel the pulse. There was something identifiable—something that Tom couldn't recall. What was there about that thin hand that marked it beyond question as the butler's?

Hamilton Quest was suddenly awake. He didn't know that he had slept less than ten minutes, but he sensed that it was far from the time to rise. He wondered why he had wakened.

Then he saw a faint light moving over his briefcase which stood open on a chair. The drapes had been drawn back and the French doors were open wide. Someone was in the room, holding a carefully shaded flashlight. But Gulliver had been on guard outside.

Still somewhat befuddled by sleep, Quest said, "Is that you, Gulliver?"

There was a quick intake of breath, soft, swift footsteps, and a firm hand clamped across Quest's mouth.

A low voice said, "Make a sound and I'll kill you!"

In the darkness, something hard crashed against his head.

"The ring!" exclaimed Tom Quest. At last he had remembered Bentley's ring with a large gold B set in a black background. He had seen it often on the butler's left hand, and he had seen it on the left hand of the man he'd found on the floor! Tom wanted to rush into his father's room and tell about the mark of identification.

But he didn't want to waken his father.

"If he's awake, I'll tell him, otherwise I'll wait 'til morning," he decided.

Taking his flashlight and his key to Hamilton Quest's room, he left his room and walked along the carpeted corridor to the last door, where he paused and listened. The typewriter was silent. He decided to unlock the door, look in, then retreat unless he found his father awake.

He turned the key in the lock silently. The door swung open on well-greased hinges.

For an instant Tom could only stare incredulously.

A flashlight lay on the table. It was small, but the light was sufficient to reveal a page of typing beside the typewriter and Hamilton Quest lying on the bed with his hands tied and a gag in his mouth. But most stunning of all was the form of a tall man silhouetted against the light. He was holding something to his face. A brilliant flash of light spilled over the table for an instant. Tom realized that a photo had been taken. He turned on his electric torch and shouted, "Gulliver! Whiz!"

The man turned. It was Bentley. The light of Tom's torch showed his face distorted with surprise for an instant before he turned and leaped through the French doors.

"Come back!" yelled Tom, as he started in pursuit.

It was dark. As he ran, Tom had to keep his flashlight turned on or lose sight of the man ahead. Bentley's long legs covered the ground rapidly. He left the patio, raced around the end of the house, and streaked down the sloping lawn toward the dock. Now he was outlined by the lights on the mainland as well as the lights of boats on the water and Tom no longer had to hold his torchbeam focused. He threw away the flashlight. Unhampered now, he increased his speed.

He rapidly cut down the butler's lead to less than

ten yards, then to five. "You can't get away, Bentley!" he cried.

Bentley kept going. He was nearing the dock when Tom put everything into a final burst of speed, then dived headlong in a football tackle. His outflung hands caught one of Bentley's legs and the butler went down hard on the soft grass.

Tom rolled, and came to his feet, then pounced on Bentley. "Got you," he said. "And if you've hurt my dad—"

Tom saw someone running from the near-by dock and recognized the lean form of C. Hollis Hall.

"Mr. Hall," he said. "This is Bentley. He—"

"Shut up!" cut in Hall. "I'm holding a gun and I'll shoot if you make a sound. Now stand up."

"Hall!" exclaimed the boy.

Bentley wrenched himself from beneath Tom and got to his feet.

"Did you get the pictures, Bentley?" asked Hall.

"Yes, but this kid saw me taking the last one!"

"Anyone else know you're working with me?"

"I doubt it. I'm sure Quest didn't recognize me."

"You—you two," gasped Tom, still too astonished to think clearly. "You're working together!"

"Walk ahead of us," said Hall. "You're going for a ride in a speedboat. Bentley, tie and gag the kid when we get him to the boat, then you can go back to the house."

"You promised to pay me—"

"You'll be paid," said Hall.

"Tom!" It was Whiz Walton shouting from near the house.

"Here, Whiz!" Tom shouted. "Help!"

Hall's gun barked and Tom felt a bullet brush his shoulder.

Then another gun cracked and spit flame in the darkness. It was fired by a man who was approaching fast, and ahead of Whiz Walton.

Hall spun, gasped in pain, and fell.

The man who had shot him in the side closed in and held his gun on Bentley.

"One move, Bentley, and I'll let *you* have it!"

"Y-You!" gasped Bentley.

Whiz Walton arrived, breathing hard and gasping. "Tom, Tom, what in blazes happened?"

"H-Hall shot me—then—then this man—shot Hall!"

"You, Riley! You're the one who was running ahead of me!"

"Yes." Riley picked up the gun that Hall had dropped, and handed it to the columnist. "Take Bentley to the house and keep him covered." He turned to Tom. "You're still on your feet, boy. Didn't Hall's bullet hit you?"

"I—I think it just nicked me."

"Keep your chin up! You've got to get to the house under your own power, because it looks like I'll have to carry Hall."

"I—I don't know what made him change so suddenly."

"I do," said Riley. "It's quite a story. I'll tell everything when we get to the house."

CHAPTER 23

Conclusion

THE BOSWORTH living room was ablaze with lights.

Hall and Bentley sat on straight chairs wearing handcuffs. Hall also wore a bandage. Tom, with his shoulder bandaged, sat between his father and Whiz Walton on a divan, and Gulliver, still looking sleepy

from the effects of the drugged coffee, lounged in a deep chair near by. Bosworth, Weaver, and Forbes Blaine were grouped with Mrs. Bosworth and Clara Nugent.

Riley stood beside the fireplace. He had presented documents that identified him as a government agent.

"I'll try," he said, "to put it all together for you.

"The other day, near Washington, a car went over a ravine, caught fire, and burned. The car was identified as belonging to a known Communist agent. The charred body of the man inside was assumed to be that agent. But dental work and other means of identification established that he was C. Hollis Hall, of the Atomic Energy Commission."

This brought gasps of amazement.

"Mr. Quest was called. He said Hall had arrived here. We knew then that Hall had been murdered so someone could come here in his place with stolen credentials. As it turns out, the man who came was the man we at first thought was killed when his car crashed. That man," Riley pointed, "is Luther Gorky, Communist agent.

"My partner and I came to Alexandria Bay. We met Charlie, the chauffeur, by pure luck while we were looking around Bosworth's garage. Charlie cooperated. He agreed to stay on the mainland while I came here with that note he wrote.

"Last night I did some snooping to try to get a line on things and find out what Gorky was up to." Riley

grinned. "I missed out on a lot of excitement by not being in the house," he said.

"Was it yo' who left them footmarks?" asked Gulliver.

"Yes," admitted the federal man.

"So that's why yo' was rakin' 'em over when I saw yo' this mornin'. Yo' didn't want me to identify yo' as the snooper."

"Right. Tonight I was patrolling the grounds around the house, waiting for something to happen, and it did!"

The federal man turned to Bentley, who looked thoroughly miserable. "You," he said, "have no Communist record."

"How do you know he hasn't?" asked Whiz.

"Because, as soon as we learned about the Inca relic, we made a check on everyone employed by Bosworth. Found them all good, loyal Americans."

"I—I didn't do it," said Bentley, "to help the Communists. I—well, I saw a chance to make money. Hall—that is, Gorky—promised me a thousand dollars if I'd help him." Bentley sighed. "It all began when he lost his insulin."

"That was yours?" demanded Bosworth.

"No use denying it," grumbled the man who had posed as C. Hollis Hall.

"Then why didn't you claim it? Why didn't you say it was yours?"

"Because it might have proved I was not C. Hollis Hall."

"It sure would have," put in Whiz Walton. "If we'd known you used insulin, we'd have known you were an impostor!"

Bentley said, "I noticed that man carrying sugar away from the table. He tried not to let anyone see him do it, but I—well, people forget the presence of the butler. I thought it odd that he'd take sugar. So when I went to prepare his room for the night, last night, I did a bit of—er—searching, and found another hypodermic needle and a supply of insulin."

Hamilton Quest explained, "People with diabetes have to be very careful to keep the proper balance of sugar in the system. If they get a little too much insulin, they go into shock and immediately have to take sugar or orange juice. For that reason, they keep sugar as well as insulin on hand at all times."

"Go on, Bentley," said Whiz Walton. "What'd you do when you realized that Hall used insulin?"

"I realized that for some reason he wanted to keep it secret. I was wondering how to make the best use of my knowledge when he entered the room. After a short discussion, I told him I was open to a proposition. We argued, and I threatened to go to Mr. Bosworth with my knowledge. I started from the room with one hand full of sugar. He followed me into the corridor and struck me on the throat."

"Then it *was* you Tom saw in the corridor," said Hamilton Quest.

Bentley nodded.

After some prodding by Riley, the Communist finally explained that he had been about to drag the butler back into his room when he heard Tom Quest open the door of his father's room.

"He was about to leave the room, so I stepped back into my room and closed the door. When young Quest bent to examine Bentley, I crept up behind him and struck him on the neck. Then I dragged Bentley into my room, and when he regained consciousness, I made a deal with him. I agreed to pay him a good price to work with me."

Gulliver looked at Bentley. "Then all that talk about yo' an' Hall—I mean the Red, bein' in the library at the time Tom said he found yo' was a lot o' hogwash."

Bentley nodded. "Hall—er—Gorky fixed up the story. Tonight he gave me a drug and told me to put it into your coffee, then watch for the chance to enter Quest's room and photograph his report."

"But my son," said Quest proudly, "spiked your plans!"

Riley said, "Gorky, we're taking you in on a murder charge."

"Murder! No, no!"

"The murder of the real C. Hollis Hall."

"I didn't have anything to do with that," cried the Communist.

"You'll probably pay for it," said the federal man, "unless we can make a case against someone else."

Bosworth said, "I'll use all of my influence to see that you pay for it!"

Weaver said, "I'll put my entire office staff at the disposal of the Government to convict you!"

The Communist's face was panicstricken. "Malin planned that murder!" he cried. "He hired men to carry it out. He started work on it as soon as he had word from Newman that Hamilton Quest was in Washington in connection with a search for uranium!"

"I'll make a phone call and we'll have Malin under arrest before morning," Riley said. "Now who's this man Newman?"

"He works for the *Metropolitan Journal.*"

"What?" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "My paper?"

"That's how he knew about Mr. Quest. He heard you and Langdon talking."

"Holy mackerel!"

"We'll get him," said Riley. "Malin and Newman will pay along with you and Bentley. I guess that raps it up."

Forbes Blaine was wide-eyed. "Uranium!" he murmured.

Bosworth grinned. "Now that you know this much," he said, "I'm going to ask Riley for permission to let you, Clara, and my wife in on all that has happened."

"Might as well," said Riley. "There's little that they don't know now. I'd like to make some phone calls.

First to my partner, to tell him to bring back your chauffeur, then to Washington."

"Help yourself," said Bosworth.

"One thing more." Riley smiled at Hamilton Quest. He reached into his pocket and brought out a tiny camera. "In this," he said, "are the photographs Bentley made. I'll destroy the film as soon as I get the original report from you."

"I was told to hand it to a man who would give me a key word," replied Quest.

"All right. *Archimedes.*"

Quest smiled. "That," he said, "is it."

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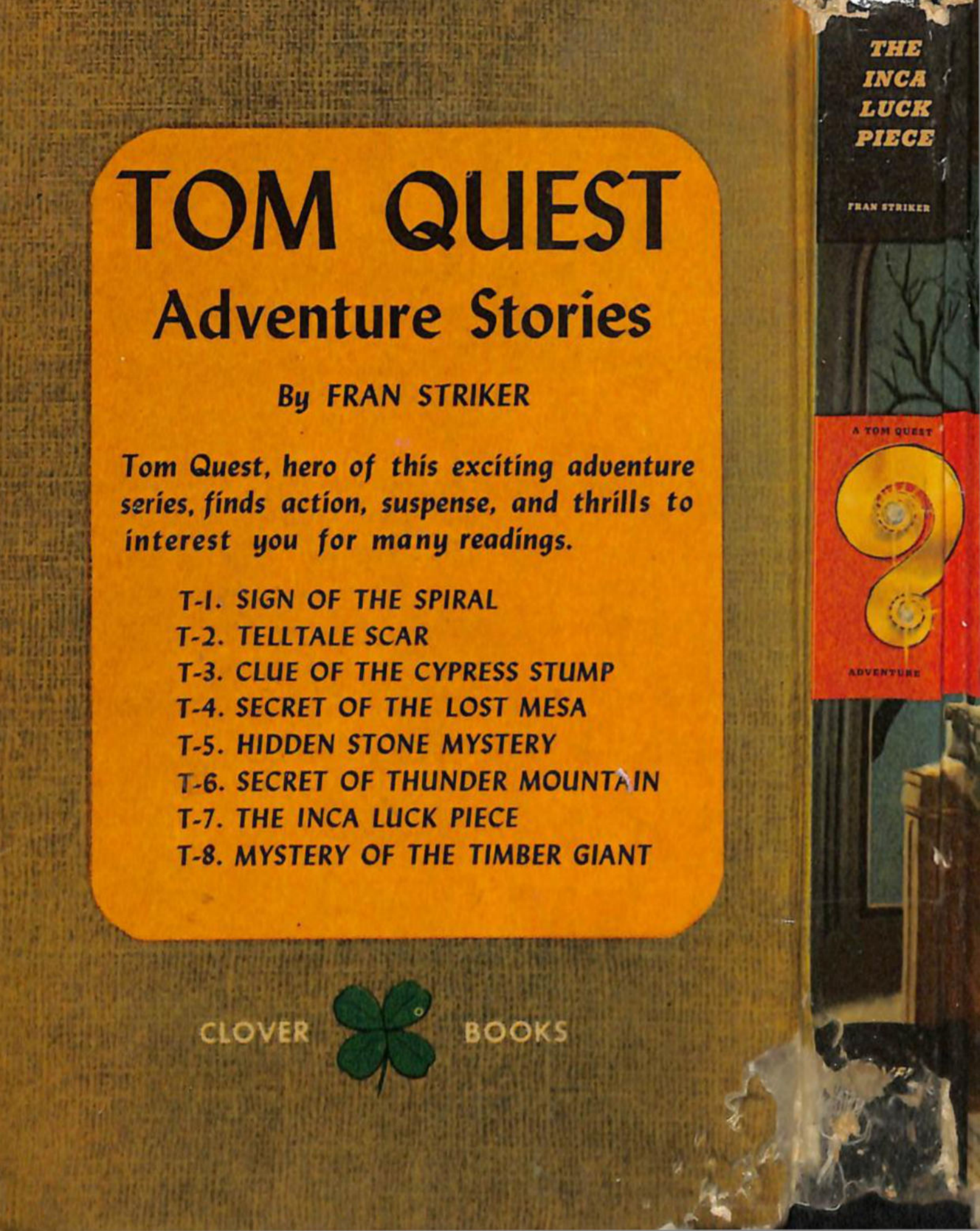

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